



## UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF STAMFORD

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### PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Congratulations* on your upcoming marriage. Your decision to make this lifetime commitment is a tribute to your faith in God and in each other.

The purpose of this statement is to assist you in answering questions that you may have. This statement will take you step by step through each phase of preparation, not only for the wedding, but for the lifetime of marriage to follow.

The most important step is to *consult with your parish priest*; he has experience in working with people who are preparing to marry.

It is also crucial that you come to understand the teachings of the Church concerning married life.

When God created Adam, God noted that it was not good for man to be alone. Eve was created. Just like Adam and Eve were created for each other, you, too, as a couple were created by God for one another. The sign of this creation is the desire deep inside each of you for intimacy which is genuine and a commitment of caring which is real. There is love, and where there is true love, God is present. God is present in your relationship. It is out of love that God created you and it is out of love that God created your marriage. It is not man or institution but God who joins you together as one. It is for this reason that marriage is "a union which is most serious and most sacred."

The relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is similar to the relationship between God and humanity. As God said to the Jews, "I will be your God and you will be my people." In marriage the couple says to each other, "I will be your spouse and you will be mine."

Each couple in their love, if it is truly marital, must have the same qualities of God's love: permanence, fidelity and life-giving growth.

By permanence, we mean that the husband and wife vow to give one another a love that is undying, in good times and in bad, for as long as they both shall live.

By fidelity, a married person recognizes that the concern for his/her spouse takes precedence over every other human love. As in our love for God, we show our commitment by living out the commandment, "You shall have no other gods," so, too, in our love for our spouse we live out a commandment, "You shall have no others."

By life-giving growth, we mean that authentic love is generous enough to make room for others. The first command that God gave to humanity was to be "fruitful and multiply." A marriage that is life-giving does so in two ways. One way is in the procreating, nurturing and educating children. The second way is by building up the mutual support between the marital partners.

These qualities are sacred. Sometimes they will be very difficult to live out. Marital vows are based upon these qualities and so they should be studied, thought about and discussed very seriously and carefully.

## 2. THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION POLICY OF THE DIOCESE OF STAMFORD

The Marriage Preparation Policy is set forth with the intention of assisting couples to develop a solid foundation for growth and fidelity in marriage. Since Christian marriage is a very serious relationship of fidelity, permanence and life-giving generosity, a decision to make this commitment requires sufficient reflection, discussion and responsible preparation.

Once a couple decides to marry, their plans should include contacting the parish priest in order to begin arrangements and to discuss some type of marriage preparation program. Your parish will need notification of your intention to marry as soon as the commitment has been made, ideally not less than six months before the date of the wedding. This time is an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with your partner and to make other preparations. In order to strengthen the relationship, one should learn about and discuss these things which promote a lasting commitment: communication skills, decision making, attitudes on sexuality and the sacramental meaning of marriage.

If one of the partners is not a Catholic, it is still to the benefit of the couple to prepare for marriage in a marriage preparation program. The knowledge of each other's faith will strengthen appreciation and love for one another. When possible, you should consult also with his/her minister or rabbi as part of your marriage preparation.

## 3. STEPS IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

A. Consult your parish priest as soon as possible. You must speak with a priest in your parish, even if another priest may be performing the ceremony. At this meeting you will discuss a possible date and time for the wedding. You will learn the parish's guidelines for weddings and be informed of the different programs for marriage preparation.

B. Make plans to attend a marriage preparation program. There are several options for preparation. Like any other sacrament, marriage requires some degree of personal preparation. The preparation is not only spiritual, but also emotional, interpersonal and even financial. Whatever type of program you pick, it is necessary to make arrangements early. Some programs fill up quickly. Remember that completing your participation in the formal program well before the wedding date can eliminate much of the stress which the calendar imposes on people who still have lots of arrangements to make and are running out of time.

1. You may have individual meetings with the parish priest.

2. You may attend a PreCana Conference in any Catholic diocese. This series of talks is for members of all faiths. Priests and married couples speak candidly on: communication, adjustment, love, sexuality, sacramentality, Church marriage regulations, the marriage ritual and final preparations. You will be given proof of your attendance at each session. This can be presented to your parish priest as part of your preparation.

3. You may attend a Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend. These weekends begin on a Friday night and end on a Sunday afternoon. During the encounter, a engaged couple has the opportunity to communicate with each other privately on many aspects of married life, always from the viewpoint of their own relationship. Ideas will be presented to you by a trained team of married couples and a priest. Reflection and dialogue with your partner are the core of the weekend. The entire group meets together for presentations, meals and prayer. For more information on the programs of the Diocese of Stamford, contact Catholic Engaged Encounter, (203) 325-2116.

4. Some parishes offer the Sponsor Couple program. Married couples will discuss with engaged couples aspects of married life in a home setting.

### C. Obtain the required documents:

1. A baptismal certificate from each of you. These can be obtained from the churches in which you were baptized. They must be recent copies, dated within six months of your wedding date. For Christians who are not Catholic, the fact of your baptism can be confirmed by a similar certificate or a letter

from the pastor of your church of baptism.

2. A letter of freedom: This is need if one or both of you are not from the Catholic parish in which the wedding will take place. This letter states that the records of your home parish show that you are free to contract marriage. A letter of freedom can be obtained from one of your parish priests. (Where this is not possible, e.g. because of destroyed records or other inaccessibility, an affidavit can be sworn out by someone who knows you well.)

3. Evidence of program participation. You will need some indication that you have completed some form of preparation program listed above.

4. Parental consent. If you are under the age of 18, you will need a letter from your parent(s) or guardian(s) giving consent and depending upon your state, the permission of a local judge.

5. Permission of Pastor. If neither of you is a member of the Catholic parish where the ceremony will be held, one of you needs to obtain permission from your current parish for the ceremony. In most cases, your current parish is understood to mean the parish in which you reside.

6. In cases involving a previous marriage, proceed with care. If you have been married before in any form whatsoever, civil or religious, make this know as soon as you begin your arrangements. A common misunderstanding is that a previous marriage before a justice of the peace "does not count." Clear up these kinds of questions immediately. Prior marriage can require:

a. a death certificate for the previous spouse.

b. a declaration of nullity issued by a Diocesan Tribunal (An

"Annulment."

c. the filing of appropriate documentation for a "lack of form" or "defect of form" case. This is done when a Catholic has been married without the required priest witness and two other witnesses. The validity of the marriage is not recognized in Church law unless a prior exception to the requirement form had been arranged. This procedure is readily arranged for you by the parish priest.

7. Complete the Pre-Nuptial Investigation. Each of you will be interviewed individually for the purpose of giving sworn testimony concerning your personal history, to establish your freedom to marry and to ascertain your understanding of marriage's purpose and your commitment to the state of matrimony.

8. Certificate of Eligibility for the Catholic witness of the marriage.

D. Obtain any necessary special permissions ("dispensations")

Dispensations from the Bishop may be required. Please allow plenty of time. An example is:

Marrying a person who is not Catholic. In this case, the parish priest applies for permission to witness the ceremony. This is an expression of the Church's pastoral concern for couples entering a mixed marriage. Along with family and friends, the Church desires that the couple be able to attain a more perfect union of mind and communion of life.

As the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote regarding mixed marriages with non-Catholic Christians:

*A number of the particular difficulties faced by Catholics and other Christians in mixed marriages result from the division among Christians. However successful these marriages may be, they do not erase the pain of that wider division. Yet this division need not weaken these marriages, and given proper understanding, they may lead to a deep spiritual unity between the spouses. Such couples should accept the painful aspects of Christian division insofar as these affect their lives together as a sharing in the suffering of the Church. Thus they should regard their personal efforts at understanding and patience as symbolic of an a participation in the broader efforts toward unity among the separated churches.*

In all such marriages, the conscientious devotion of the Catholic to his/her Catholic faith is to be safeguarded, and the conscience of the other party is to be respected. This is in keeping with the principle of religious

to his/her Catholic faith is to be safeguarded, and the conscience of the other party is to be respected. This is in keeping with the principle of religious liberty.

An opportunity to recognize, to safeguard and even to deepen the faith of the Catholic party is provided in the form of declaration and promise. The declaration states that one intends to continue living in the faith of the Catholic Church. The promise is to do all in their power to share the have received with children and baptizing them in the Catholic Church.

So that mutual understanding might be achieved and possible disharmony avoided, the conscience of the non-Catholic is to be respected. First by making the party aware of the partner's declaration and promise. Second by recognizing the conscientious commitment which the non-Catholic would have to his or her own religious values. The non-Catholic party is not asked to make a promise.

#### **4. PLAN THE CEREMONY**

Now that the paperwork is in process, you can turn your thoughts to the ceremony itself. You will want to work closely with the priest performing the ceremony and the local cantor or choir director.

#### **5. OBTAIN A CIVIL MARRIAGE LICENSE**

Since the requirements of each state of the diocese are different, please discuss this with your pastor or local civil authorities. This should be given to the priest no later than the wedding rehearsal.

#### **6. DO THE FINAL PREPARATIONS**

1. The wedding rehearsal. Schedule this well in advance with the priest and all parties involved. Be punctual, as tardiness may infringe upon others' valuable time.

2. Spiritual preparation is essential for an authentic personal marriage commitment. Asking God's forgiveness for the hurts we have done is an excellent preparation for marriage. Practically speaking confessions may be rushed at the rehearsal and should be scheduled earlier.