401 Preparation For Christian Marriage

401 PREPARATION FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

401.1 Preparing Couples for Marriage Commitment:

The vocation to Christian marriage demands a serious commitment. Consequently, the Church desires to do all that it can so that couples are adequately prepared to accept the responsibilities of Christian marriage and to fulfill them faithfully.

401.2 A Life-Time Commitment:

The parish community shall take responsibility for preparing couples for their wedding day and for the life-time commitment of living a Christian marriage.

401.3 Minimum of 6 Months of Preparation:

The formal preparation for marriage shall begin at least six months before the anticipated date of the wedding.

401.4 Receiving Sacrament of Confirmation:

Canon 1065 §1 states “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.”

Procedure:

A) Immediate preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation could be included as part of the marriage preparation process.

B) The right to marriage cannot be denied if a person has not yet been confirmed.

C) Pastoral leaders should assist the confirmation candidate in seeking out opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with other parishes or at an Archdiocesan celebration at time prior to the wedding.

D) The celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation presumes a proper disposition on the part of the candidate.

401.5 Setting the Wedding Date:

No firm date for a wedding shall be set until the conclusion of the couple's first meeting with the parish minister and the parties are determined to be free to marry in the Catholic Church.

401.6 Marriage Preparation Programs:

In addition to the personal interviews and the instruction and counseling provided by the parish minister, a variety of marriage preparation offerings are available to meet the individual needs of engaged couples. The parish minister shall recommend the appropriate marriage preparation process in which the couple is to participate.

401.6.1 Preparation:

Priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and Pastoral Life Directors are to share the responsibility for preparing couples for marriage with parishioners who have received suitable catechesis and formation in marriage preparation and who can appropriately minister to engaged couples.

401.6.2 Persons with Disabilities:

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in sponsor couple programs is an especially effective way of supporting both the needs and the gifts of couples preparing for marriage.

401.6.3 Six Sessions: It is strongly urged that there be six sessions devoted to marriage preparation:

•Session I: Initial meeting with parish minister, including the Pre-nuptial Investigation.

•Sessions II, III, and IV: Include catechesis and personal formation for marriage.

◦These sessions may be satisfied by three sessions with a pastoral minister or by attending a marriage preparation program, in accord with the Archdiocesan Sacramental Regulations and Guidelines for marriage. See the Archdiocesan website for approved forms for marriage preparation programs: www.archbalt.org/family-life/marriage-family/marriage-preparation/index.cfm.

◦Topics for the sessions should include catechesis on the sacrament and vocation of marriage, communication skills, decision making, finances, spirituality, sexuality, and family planning.

•Session V: Follow-up session with parish minister, to discuss the catechetical and personal formation sessions.

•Session VI: Follow-up session with parish minister, to complete planning for the wedding liturgy.

401.6.4 Parish Preparation:

Parishes should maintain at least one type of process for catechetical and personal formation of couples preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage. Parishes may also collaborate with neighboring parishes to provide this part of marriage preparation for couples who request it. Parishes may collaborate with the Office of Family Life and Ministry for the formation of pastoral ministers and for support in offering marriage preparation opportunities.

401.6.5 Publicizing Policies:

Expectations for marriage preparation are to appear in the parish bulletin, parish website and in parish sacramental handbooks.

401.7 Delaying the Wedding:

The right of the faithful to marry must be properly respected and the decision to delay the marriage of any couple should be approached cautiously.

401.7.1 Special Circumstances:

When special circumstances are present, (for example:, an unwillingness to prepare for marriage; a lack of openness to faith; a serious lack of maturity; teenagers 18 years of age or younger; pregnancy; extended separation before or after the wedding) or if some reasonable question is raised concerning the couple's readiness to marry, delaying the wedding would be prudent. Further consultation and evaluation may be required before a wedding date can be set.

401.7.2 Right of Appeal:

To insure that a couple's rights are respected, a couple must be informed of their right to appeal the decision to delay their wedding date to the Chancellor.

401.7.3 Consultation:

The parish minister should consult with the Chancellor in difficult cases or where concerns are expressed by the couple.

401.7.4 Decision of Parish Minister:

Upon consultation with the Chancellor, the parish minister can decide:

•The special circumstances warrant delaying the wedding.

•The special circumstances are not of a serious enough nature to impede a

couple’s ability to enter into a successful marriage. If such a decision is reached, the date of the wedding can be set and formal marriage preparation can begin.

•Additional information is needed. The parish minister will undertake a more in-depth assessment. No date for the wedding can be set until a positive decision has been made.