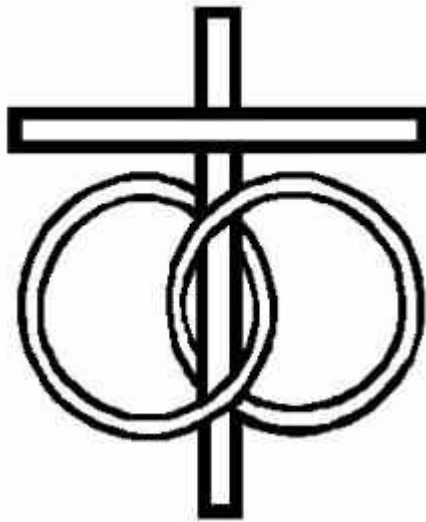


DIOCESE OF GALLUP

MARRIAGE

A. THEOLOGICAL AND CANONICAL MEANING

Marriage is a sacred relationship. For individual persons, it is a moment of profound richness and dignity. For the community, it is an institution that serves as one of the basic bonds which holds our society together. For the Church, it is a sacramental event that gives a visible sign of God's presence and graceful intervention in our lives.



The Church has a rich tradition in its teaching on sacramental marriage and covenantal union. Throughout the Old Testament the authors speak of God making a covenant with the chosen people and promising that they will never be forsaken. The authors of the New Testament speak of Jesus as the new covenant and compare the relationship of Jesus with the Church to the relationship of a husband and wife.

The Church believes that the sacred union of husband and wife is itself a sacrament and acknowledges God's unconditional love and presence in their relationship. The couple is assured of God's graces as they face the struggles and joys of a lifelong journey of faith together. The bride and groom are the ministers in this unique sacrament of marriage. For this reason, it is their responsibility to judge their readiness for marriage in relationship, and in personal faith. The Church is here to assist in making a judgment concerning ""-"" readiness for marriage and to provide an environment of support and love in which the

couple can succeed. Through marriage preparation the couple will be given an opportunity to review their decision to marry and their decision may be reinforced through the preparation.

In order to provide strong support and care for the couple as they enter the sacred state of marriage, the Diocese of Gallup has prepared these Pastoral Guidelines for Marriage Preparation. These guidelines have

not been written to make it difficult to marry in the Catholic Church. Rather, they have been written to help couples more deeply realize the serious and sacred, yet joyful and life-giving nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The intention of the marriage preparation process established in these pastoral guidelines is to enable couples to pray together in the community of the Church, to be God's witnesses in the world, and to "reach old age in the company of friends, and come at last to the kingdom of heaven" (Rite of Marriage, Nuptial Blessing 3).

B. PASTORAL APPROACHES

Marriage is a sacrament. It can also be one of the greatest sources of strength, hope and encouragement in a person's life. But sustaining a grace-filled marriage requires patience, sacrifice, flexibility and a lifetime of honest communication.

Because the Catholic Church puts a high value on marriage and wants people to have successful marriages that bring them happiness and joy, it believes that marriage should not be entered into lightly.

When one chooses to get married in the Catholic Church, one is asking for more than a ceremony, a church building and a musician. The person is asking to celebrate a sacrament. They will make a vow before God, family, friends and their future spouse to stay married for the rest of their life. This is a momentous promise and commitment.

In an effort to help prepare for that commitment and for the sacrament, the catholic church requires participation in a marriage preparation process. The process will provide an opportunity to talk about personal values, such as faith, money, work, sex, children, marriage and a spouse. By talking about these things in advance a greater understanding of areas that will require special sensitivity and openness in marriage are identified.

For many couples this process is a wonderful time of affirmation. It reminds them of all the good things they have working in their favor. For other couples, the process is an opportunity to discuss issues that should be addressed before they make a lifetime commitment.

The wedding ceremony and celebration last for one day; marriage will last for a lifetime.

C. LOCATION OF PREPARATION AND WEDDING LITURGY

The wedding liturgy is central to the marriage celebration. The following guidelines will assist in determining in which parish couples should marry and how to proceed if marriage is to be celebrated in a parish other than one in which the couple has residence or is registered.

Guidelines:

The wedding liturgy and preparation for marriage are to take place in a parish in which at least one person of the couple is resident.

If marriage will not take place at the parish where the couple resides, their pastor(s) must give permission for a wedding to take place in another church,

D. EARLY CONTACT WITH THE PARISH ;

The guidelines advising early contact with the parish are intended to insure that adequate time to prepare for marriage and the wedding celebration is afforded. They also provide the pastor, deacon or pastoral ministers and the couple with an opportunity to develop a relationship with one another.

Guidelines

Preparation for marriage will begin when engagement is announced, even if that is a year or more before the proposed wedding date. They must contact their parish a minimum of four months prior to the date of the wedding; preferably six months.

It is recommended that formal preparation be completed at least six weeks prior to the anticipated date of the wedding.

E. ENGAGEMENT BLESSING

An engagement blessing emphasizes the importance of this time of discernment and preparation for marriage. It also provides a ritual through which families and the parish community can bless the couple and become involved in the journey of faith in marriage.

Guideline:

Following the engagement announcement, the parish may provide an opportunity for the family and members of the parish community to affirm the couple's decision through an engagement blessing.

F. THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESS



I. The Initial Session

The Church wants the couple's relationship and marriage to be successful and to be a source of happiness and blessing throughout their lives. The initial meeting will help to

explain the marriage preparation process, determine canonical and civil eligibility for marriage, and explore the possibility for the sacrament of confirmation if one of the couple is a Catholic who has not been confirmed.

Guideline:

The initial session with the pastor/deacon or pastoral minister will occur as soon as the couple informs the parish that they have decided to marry.

2. Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage

This section of marriage preparation presents the essential Christian and human aspects of marriage so that the couple may come to a deeper understanding of all the dimensions of the marriage covenant. It provides them with concrete means

Guidelines:

When a Catholic plans to marry a person of another church, ecclesial community, denomination, religion or faith, the couple are to participate in additional sessions about the Catholic faith.

The involvement of the pastor, deacon or pastoral ministers from the community of faith of each partner is encouraged when the non-Catholic would like him or her to be involved.

J. MARRIAGE OF NON-PRACTICING CATHOLICS

The following guideline is intended to help the couple develop a deeper

understanding and appreciation of their Catholic faith, if either of them is a non-practicing Catholic.

Guideline:

When one or both of the parties entering marriage is a non-practicing Catholic, the couple are to participate in additional sessions in the Catholic faith.

K. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Sometimes special circumstances warrant special attention in marriage preparation. This section of the guidelines addresses a number of circumstances that may arise.

Guidelines

1. Absent Partner/Long Distance Relationships. When the application of these guidelines is not possible due to absence or distance, the pastor or pastoral minister will offer alternative ways to carry out the spirit of the guidelines. When suitable alternatives cannot be found, delay of the marriage may be appropriate.
2. Dysfunctional Relationships. In relationships where physical, chemical, sexual or emotional abuse is evident, marriage should be delayed until appropriate remedial action has been taken.
3. Cohabitation. Pastors, deacons or pastoral ministers will explain and discuss with the couple the teachings of the Church regarding human sexuality and marriage, and the reasons for the Church's disapproval of cohabitation before proceeding with the marriage.
4. Ethnic, Cultural and Racial Differences. These guidelines will be pastorally and sensitively interpreted in light of the ethnicity, culture and race of the couple.
5. HIV and Marriage. While the present Code of Canon Law does not list HIV/Aids as an impediment to marriage, it is essential that the couple receive proper counsel prior to any decision to marry if either one has tested positive to HIV I Aids.

If a person has tested positive to HIV/Aids and is contemplating marriage, they must inform their prospective spouse of the virus infection.

In situations where one or both partners have HIV/Aids the couple will be requested to explore the unique issues they face with a qualified representative of the Church.

6. Marriage of Persons Under Age Nineteen. If either of the couple is not yet nineteen years of age, additional meetings with the couple and their v parents are advised to determine if it is appropriate to proceed with the wedding at this time. Other professional counsel will be recommended if necessary.

7 .Marriage of Older Couples. The marriage preparation process should be adapted to the age and maturity of the couple, but marriage preparation should not be eliminated.

8. Marriage of Persons with Disabilities. In general, persons with disabilities have a right to marry, but certain physical and mental disabilities may be an impediment to marriage. Pastors, deacons and pastoral ministers should extend appropriate pastoral care.

9. Pregnancy. Pregnancy of itself is not the determining factor in proceeding with or delaying a marriage, nor is it sufficient reason to omit the marriage preparation process.

10. Remarriage. Preparation for remarriage includes a process to determine canonical freedom to marry and to implement the marriage preparation guidelines while sensitively addressing the unique challenges the couple may face.

L. VALIDATION OF A MARRIAGE

If the couple has married outside the Church and now wish to have the marriage validated, their understanding and appreciation of the sacrament they are entering will be deepened through marriage preparation.

Guideline:

Couples approaching the Church for validation of their marriage must participate in an appropriate marriage preparation process before the marriage is validated.

M. PASTORAL CARE AFTER MARRIAGE

The Church is concerned that the couple's love will continue to grow and their marriage relationship will be strengthened and deepened throughout the years of marriage. The couple is encouraged to participate in marriage and family enrichment programs that will be available through the parish and diocese.

Guideline:

Pastors, deacons and pastoral ministers are to take practical steps to insure that the parish continues to support the couple as they seek to live out the sacrament of marriage.

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