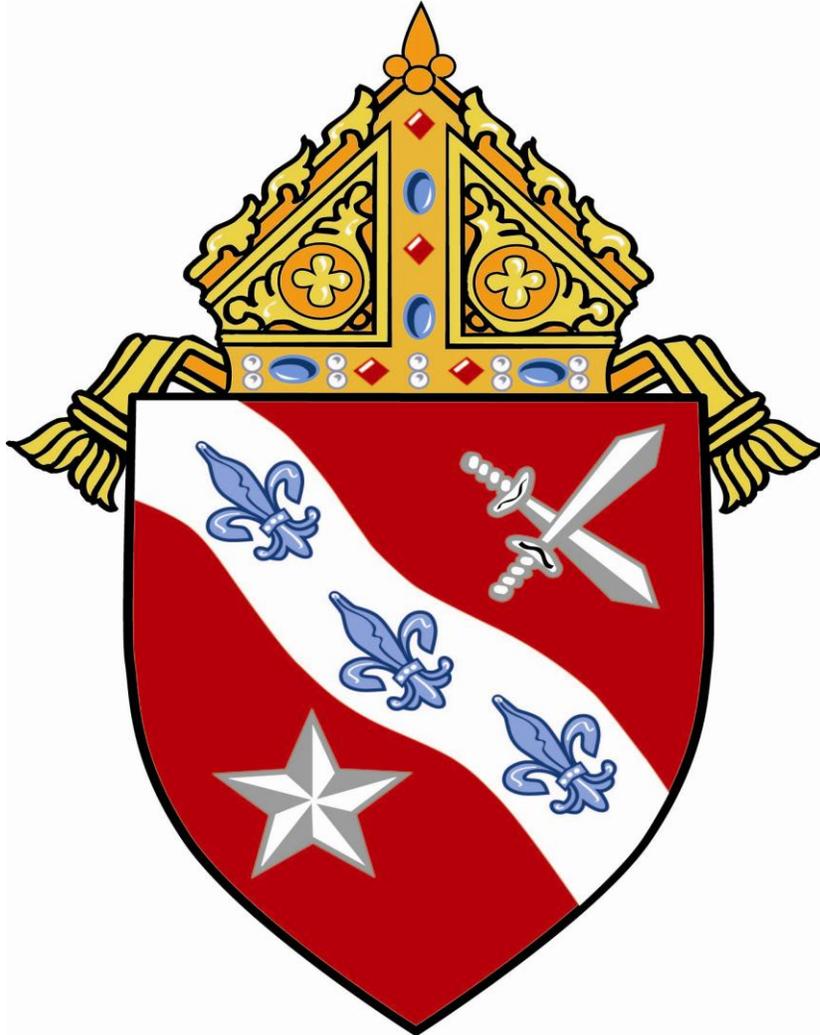


# SACRAMENTAL POLICY HANDBOOK



Baptism, First Eucharist and First Reconciliation,  
Confirmation and Anointing of the Sick

**DIOCESE OF DALLAS**  
2012

# Sacramental Guidelines

Diocese of Dallas  
2012

Sacrament  
of  
(Infant)  
Baptism

## INTRODUCTION

Christ sent His Apostles to all nations to preach and teach the values of the Gospel. Christ further challenged the Apostles to baptize in the name of the Trinity, so that we might be born again into the Kingdom of God.

Many centuries later, the Church even here in the Diocese of Dallas, is faced with the challenge to teach the values of Christ and share the gift of Baptism with our people. It is our responsibility to catechize the People of God properly. It is also our role to support the parishes in celebrating the sacrament meaningfully. The Church wishes to help parents understand their role as the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. It is the purpose of these guidelines to assist each pastor and parish in their particular needs.

## I. THE ONE TO BE BAPTIZED

The Church desires that infants be brought to the sacrament of Baptism in the first few weeks after birth (cf. CCC 1250 & CIC 867). The act of requesting Baptism for a child is in itself a sign of faith. The preparation for the baptism of an infant is directed to parents and godparents. We should remember that God's very nature is to share life and love, so vividly demonstrated in the life of a young child. The young child is yet to grow in the Christian faith, and possesses potentials that we must help form.

Children who have not reached the "age of discretion" (7 years old) must be initiated using this rite (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, 1). Children age seven and older must be initiated through the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, adapted for children (cf. RCIA, 252, ff.; National Statutes, 18-21). Pastoral discretion should be used in adapting the Rite of Baptism for those persons with various mental and physical challenges.

## II. PARENTS

- A. Formation is a fundamental element of Christian Initiation. It must be connected with the sacrament of Baptism, "the sacrament of faith" (cf. GDC 66). The preparation of parents is a prerequisite in the baptism of their child. Pastoral discretion is required concerning the frequency of such preparation (cf. CIC, canon 867).
- B. After the birth of their child, or even before, parents should approach their pastor or his delegate to request baptism for their child, as soon as possible (cf. CIC, canon 867).
- C. At least one parent or legal guardian should be a baptized Catholic in making a request for the baptism of a child. The non-Catholic parent should be willing to have the child baptized in the Catholic faith. In cases where there is opposition, pastoral counseling should present options for the future celebration of the sacrament.
- D. The custodial parent, in the case of separation or divorce, may seek baptism for their child, or children. The civil settlement may affect

the actual manner in which the religious upbringing of the child is to be conducted. These legal terms should be respected.

- E. The Rite of Baptism encourages parents to practice their faith and understand it more deeply. When assisting parents at the time of children's baptisms, clergy and lay persons, who represent the church, should, in their attitude and all they do, be inviting and solicitous in assisting parents to prepare for and convalidate a marriage in order to more fully practice their faith.
- F. According to the precepts of Canon Law (CIC 857, §2), parents requesting Baptism of their child should ordinarily be members of the parish. With special permission of their pastor, they may request Baptism in another parish.
- G. Parents and guardians who have special needs, particular to their circumstances, whether they are migrants; families under stress; single parents or guardians, should expect and receive community pastoral care from their parish. Baptism of children should not be refused to those without permanent domicile. Special care should be taken to consider such cases on an individual basis.

### **III. GODPARENTS**

- A. "Each child may have a godfather and a godmother; the word 'godparents' is used in the rite to describe both." (*Rite of Baptism for Children* 6)
- B. Only one godparent is necessary. The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, received Eucharist), at least 16 years old, and must be leading a sacramental life in harmony with the church (cf. CIC canon 874). If married they should be married according to the norms of the Church. The godparent should be willing to accept the responsibility of assisting the parents in developing the faith life of the child.
- C. The godparent(s) may be asked to share information regarding their own status as practicing Catholics, or that they have attended baptismal classes. The pastor and the parish staff should use discernment in this matter. The godparents, if unknown to the pastor, could provide a letter

of testimony from a witness, or from their own parish community. A signed statement from the sponsor as to their status as a practicing Catholic, may be provided, if that is acceptable to the local pastor.

- D. The godparent may not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized (cf. CIC canon 874).
- E. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register (CIC canon 873, there is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of either sex).
- F. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a Christian witness at the request of the parents, but there must be a Catholic godparent. A lapsed Catholic should not be a Christian witness (cf. CIC canon 874).
- G. Godparents should ordinarily be instructed to attend Baptismal Preparation in order to better understand their role as godparents. Such Preparation also provides opportunity for renewal of, and new understandings about, the Catholic faith.
- H. Any person may serve as a proxy if the godparent is unable to be physically present at the baptism. The Church requires no specific stipulations regarding who may serve as a proxy.

#### **IV. PARISH**

- A. The priest or deacon is the ordinary minister of Baptism. If Baptism is celebrated during Mass, the priest celebrant ordinarily confers the sacrament of baptism.
- B. Outside the case of necessity, it is not lawful for anyone, without the required permission, to confer baptism in the territory of another, not even upon his own people (cf. CIC canon 862).
- C. The baptismal rite should ordinarily be celebrated in the context of a Sunday liturgy before the entire community. When baptism is celebrated apart from Sunday liturgy, proper liturgical principles should

be followed. The use of music and the various liturgical ministries is encouraged.

- D. The Paschal season is the most appropriate time to celebrate the sacrament of Baptism; however, it may be needed to schedule baptisms, outside of Mass, during the Lenten season as well.
- E. The validity and integrity of the sacrament of Baptism require both matter and form. The matter of the sacrament consists of the pouring or immersion with water. The formula for Baptism to be used is always: **“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”**
- F. The pastor/pastoral administrator is responsible for implementing, supporting, and maintaining a preparation process for those who seek Baptism for an infant. An effective catechesis for Baptism preparation would be based on the Rite of Baptism for Children. The catechists chosen for this process should be knowledgeable and well formed in their faith.
- G. As a model of catechesis for this sacrament, the parents are the primary providers. As a consequence, the parents should be provided with effective, accessible catechesis and a good process for their own faith formation. Such a process would include a comprehensive presentation on the meaning of the sacrament with the opportunity for participants to reflect and discuss.
- H. The pastor/pastoral administrator is personally responsible to ensure all baptisms are properly recorded.

## V. NORMS FOR READINESS

- A. If parents request baptism for their child and, there is a realistic hope that the child will be raised Catholic, baptism cannot be denied (CCC 1253).
- B. Parents *must participate in a parish-provided program that leads them to understand and therefore be supported in their role as “first teachers of their child in the ways of faith” (Rite of Baptism for Children, Final Blessing 105).*

- C. If there is well founded concern that the child will not be raised Catholic, baptism will be delayed for further formation of the parents. The pastor or pastoral administrator has the ultimate responsibility for this decision.

## **SUMMARY**

Effective sacramental preparation encourages parents and godparents to be informed and committed to a lifelong process of catechesis. We should therefore not create obstacles for the baptism of children, but rather use the sacrament of baptism as an opportunity to inform the People of God as to their calling to follow Christ and the living out of their own baptismal vows. We need to adapt our preparation programs to the needs, age and circumstances of the candidates.

Our preparation and catechesis should focus on the meaning of Baptism and the Scriptural origin. We should reflect on how that celebration has been adapted through history and the significance of entry and welcome into a community of faith. We should reflect on the symbols and prayers of the liturgical rite. We should urge our people to accept the call of discipleship.

## **CONCLUSION**

These policies are the current norm in the Diocese of Dallas in conformity with Liturgical Law and Canon Law. This document is intended to be adapted in consideration of future developments in parish life.

# Sacramental Guidelines

Diocese of Dallas

2012

First Reception of  
The Sacrament of Penance  
and  
First Reception of Holy Eucharist

## INTRODUCTION

The mercy of Christ is expressly shared in the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (sometimes referred to as Reconciliation) with those who wish to follow Christ the Good Shepherd. Faith is a living relationship with God that requires, as any relationship, communication with God to remain healthy. Prayer is the way that children can best communicate with God, and when sin is committed, children use prayer to attend to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and seek forgiveness. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit assists young people in understanding the reality of sin and accepting God's invitation to be reconciled.

The Church fulfills the command of the Lord to "feed my sheep" most vividly in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The celebration of the Lord's Day each Sunday brings the Body and Blood of Christ as pure gift in Holy Communion. Receiving the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time is the initial step in lifelong strengthening of faith, begun when the gift of Baptism was received. United in love, Eucharist enables the human family to continually draw closer in love.

It is our calling to impress upon our young people the personal concern and love that God has for us. The parish community, as well as their family and friends, are to help them by word and example to grow and become witnesses of the Gospel.

The Diocese of Dallas, in union with the whole Church, wishes to help our young people and their families to treasure the Sacraments of Penance (Reconciliation) and of the Holy Eucharist as an integral part of their lives. It is the purpose of these guidelines to assist each pastor and parish in their particular needs.

**I. REGARDING THE FIRST RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (e.g. First Reconciliation) AND OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

*Canon 914: It is the responsibility, in the first place, of parents and those who take the place of parents as well as of the pastor to see that children who have reached the use of reason are correctly prepared and are nourished by the divine food as early as possible, preceded by sacramental confession; it is also for the pastor to be vigilant lest any children come to the Holy Banquet who have not reached the use of reason or whom he judges are not sufficiently disposed.*

**A. Recipient: Penitent & Communicant**

1. Children are to be prepared for First Reconciliation or Penance and receive the Sacrament prior to receiving First Eucharist. A two-year program is presumed in this process. Both sacraments would generally be received in Grade Two. The two sacraments should be celebrated at different times in order to make them distinct in the minds of the recipients.

**B. Readiness for reception**

1. The readiness required for the Sacrament of Reconciliation consists in the capacity to discern between right and wrong, together with the understanding, appropriate to the child's age, of the reality of sin.
2. The readiness required for First Eucharist includes the ability to discern the difference between the Eucharist and ordinary bread and wine, and the ability to give reverence to the Holy Eucharist.

**C. Sensitivity to Persons with Disabilities (Special Needs)**

1. It may happen that a particular child has special needs (mentally- and/or physically- or emotionally- challenged) therefore practical consideration and attention should be given to make the child and

family welcomed and supported as members of the parish community, and recipients of the sacraments.

2. It is permitted in Canon Law (canon 983, §2) that interpreters be used if required by the physical limitations or linguistic needs of the penitent. The interpreter must understand that they are bound by the secrecy of the confessional.
3. Some persons may have special physical needs in order to receive the Holy Eucharist, and others may have intolerance to gluten. Therefore, the pastor should take care that these persons are cared for in a practical and welcoming manner. The Office of Worship can provide helpful assistance in determining the appropriateness of the matter for reception of Communion, and for pastoral information to implement catechesis.

D. Possible delay

1. Children who are well prepared for First Reconciliation generally welcome this opportunity to experience God's mercy. Parents or guardians of a child may occasionally indicate that their child is too young to receive the Sacrament of Penance. In such a case, after due pastoral discernment, delay of both Penance and Communion is sometimes the most suitable resolution.

E. Reconciliation before First Holy Eucharist

1. The law of the Church requires that the Sacrament of Reconciliation be received before the First Eucharist (canon 914). The pastoral norm is that First Reconciliation should be experienced before receiving the First Eucharist.

F. Anonymity and Freedom of Choice

1. Privacy in receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be afforded a penitent, as is stated by the law of the Church (canon 983). In addition, the law of the Church requires that the penitent have freedom to choose their confessor (canon 991). The pastor should take care to provide more than one confessor on the occasion of a First Reconciliation and at other times as well. No

child should be compelled to use a particular confessor. Children may use a confessor outside their parish for First Reconciliation, or at any other time.

2. The verbal assurance from a parent, catechist or even the child themselves is sufficient evidence that they have received the Sacrament of Penance. A written letter or document is not to be requested or issued guaranteeing the reception of this sacrament, nor should one be signed by a confessor, parish priest, or parish staff member. Again, the principle of privacy and freedom of choice is to be respected.

G. Regarding the Rite of Christian Initiation adapted for Children

1. The *Rite of Christian Initiation adapted for Children* (RCIC) is an approved approach to catechetical and sacramental formation.
2. The pastor should take care that the parents involved are well informed as to how the process is to be administered. A two-year program is recommended for these children, just as it is for children in other programs.

## II. PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

A. Celebration of the First Reconciliation

1. It is recommended that a public celebration including catechists, family and friends be present to support the children receiving both Reconciliation and the Eucharist for the first time. Care should be taken to follow the rites and liturgy of the Church in a way appropriate to the mentality of children. The celebration should speak of God's love for them, and also emphasize that God's grace will help them in the future. A choice of confessors should be available.
2. It may be helpful to have a private celebration of confession for a particular child, or group of children, even so, the choice of a confessor and the privacy of the penitent is to be preserved.

3. *The Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution* (USCCB, 2010) in the ritual text is an excellent liturgical guide for planning the celebration of First Reconciliation. Age-appropriate adaptations in music and the language of prayer may be made, if needed.

## B. Celebration of the First Eucharist

1. The First reception of Holy Eucharist is most appropriately celebrated at a regularly scheduled Sunday mass during the Easter Season.
2. Another day of the week, or even season of the year, may be selected by the parish for various practical reasons, such as the capacity of the church, the number of Sunday masses and the attention of the young children. If the celebration of First Eucharist occurs on Sunday, the Sunday readings are to be used. Age-appropriate forms of the readings may be substituted, however, from the Lectionary for Children.
3. *The Directory for Children's Masses* may be appropriately used, especially in a liturgy intended primarily for the First Communicants and their families.
4. Holy Eucharist distributed under both species, that is, the consecrated host (the Body of Christ) and consecrated wine (the Blood of Christ [or Precious Blood]), is most appropriate on the solemn occasion of a First Eucharist. It is the "full sign" of the Holy Eucharist. In some circumstances, the pastor may determine it appropriate to administer First Eucharist under the form of intinction. It should be noted that intinction must always be carried out by the priest (or bishop), "The Body and Blood of Christ" (GIRM n. 287). Further, appropriate catechesis should include how to receive Communion on subsequent days, when intinction is not the norm in a parish celebration of liturgy. The Office of Worship can assist with catechesis and liturgical norms, if intinction is chosen for receiving First Eucharist.

5. The Eucharistic fast for one hour, and the understanding of the “Easter Duty” should be made known to the First Communicants and to their families (canons 919 & 920).

## **SUMMARY**

Effective sacramental preparation should encourage parents as well as the first recipients of these sacraments to be informed and committed to a lifelong process of catechesis. Our young people need to understand that to be forgiven by God challenges us to forgive others. Our young people need to understand that to be fed by the Lord allows us to be united with Him and to become more like Him as His followers. We draw strength, joy, and peace from the grace received through frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

## **CONCLUSION**

We need to adapt our preparation programs to the actual needs, age and circumstances of the recipients. These sacramental guidelines regarding the *First Reception of the Sacraments of Penance and First Holy Eucharist* are the current policy in the Diocese of Dallas.

# Sacramental Guidelines

Diocese of Dallas  
2012

Sacrament  
of  
Confirmation

## INTRODUCTION

The Church is called to enable the People of God, through proper catechesis, to become effective witnesses of the Gospel. The Sacrament of Confirmation, which seals the Sacrament of Baptism, helps us to recognize and use our gifts and talents as we receive the Holy Spirit as gift. We become, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, strengthened to bear witness to the message of Christ “for the building up of his body in faith and love.”<sup>1</sup>

The Diocese of Dallas, in union with the whole Church, wishes to help our people, through these expressed policies, to understand the importance of the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is the purpose of these policies, along with additional liturgical guidelines, to assist each pastor and parish in preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The following guidelines have been approved by the Bishop of Dallas to support and direct the proper and dignified celebration and receipt of the Sacrament of Confirmation according to the Rites of the Church and the norms and customs of the Diocese of Dallas.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rite of Confirmation*, cf. Introduction, Washington, D.C., ©United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.

## I. PARTICIPANTS IN THE RITE

### A. Recipient (“Confirmand”) of the Sacrament

1. It is normative in the Diocese of Dallas that the Sacrament of Confirmation of young people who have been baptized is administered in the eighth grade. *A grace period in which to readjust sacramental programs from high school to eighth grade will be enacted until the First Sunday of Advent 2013.*

### B. Sponsor

1. Sponsor must be a confirmed and practicing Catholic who has reached sixteen years of age (canon 874). Pastors are reminded to insure that this requirement has been met.
2. In order to express more clearly the relationship between Baptism and Confirmation and to make the duty and function of the sponsor more effective, “It is desirable that the godparent at Baptism, if present, also be the sponsor at Confirmation.” (canon 893, §2) This ideal expresses clearly the relationship between Confirmation and Baptism.
3. An individual sponsor for each confirmand should be obtained. While the same sponsor may serve for one or two candidates, the practice of a single sponsor for the whole class or for part of a class is not in keeping with the spirit of the Rite of Confirmation.
4. The sponsor for any confirmand may be male or female, and should be at least sixteen years old (canon 874, °2).
5. According to the directives (canons 893, 874, §1 and 874, §5), neither the father nor the mother of a confirmand may be a sponsor. At the rite of anointing, only the sponsor accompanies the confirmand to the bishop.

### C. Minister

1. The bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation. He may delegate any priest for this duty. Outside the Easter Vigil and the Vigil and Solemnity of Pentecost, a pastor must seek permission to confirm any baptized Catholic.

#### D. The Christian Community

1. Since Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation into the mystery of the Church, its celebration ought to take place in the midst of the parish community. Representatives from the clergy and parish community should all be present. The Office of Worship will assist in coordinating all liturgical preparations for the celebration of the Rite of Confirmation in the parish.

#### E. Records

1. The Confirmation Register must include the name of the minister, name of the confirmed, names of the parents and sponsor, the date and place of celebration, and the place of baptism for each of the confirmed. Notation must also be made in the baptismal Register (or) sent to the place of Baptism of the Confirmed.

#### F. Catechesis

1. The celebration of Confirmation provides an opportunity for catechesis for the whole parish. In general, a two-year preparation is expected for the confirmandi. Of particular importance is the planning for and implementation of adequate catechesis of the youth, their parents and sponsor.
2. Involvement of parents and sponsor at the time of Confirmation is an excellent form of adult education, also. It is a teachable moment that is generally very well received, affording the opportunity for parents and children to be involved together at an important time in their lives.
3. A prayer service (e.g., a communal celebration of the sacrament of Penance) may be held in conjunction with a rehearsal for all of those to be confirmed. The participation of their parents and sponsor in the service can be very effective in modeling respect and reverence for this sacrament.
4. The confirmandi should use a saint's name for the rite of Confirmation. If appropriate, the confirmandi may use their baptismal name again. He/she should understand that a saint's

name is to be chosen to embody a model and intercessor. The doctrine of the Communion of Saints should be thoroughly explained to the confirmandi as part of their catechesis.

#### G. Particular Ritual signs

1. Since the proper signs of Confirmation are the laying on of hands and the anointing with chrism, stoles are not appropriate symbols for those being confirmed. Stoles are a symbol of the ordained, not of the universal priesthood of the faithful.

#### H. The Rite of Confirmation

1. The Rite of Confirmation is usually celebrated within the Eucharistic Liturgy.
2. The confirmandi should know the various elements of the ceremony and their significance: profession of faith, laying on of hands, prayer for the sending of the Holy Spirit, the anointing and the formula for anointing, and the kiss of peace. If asked, they should be able to explain these to the bishop.
3. During the confirmations, an assistant shows a clearly printed card to the bishop or his delegate and announces the Confirmation name clearly to him. This movement may be facilitated if the sponsor holds the card. The bishop anoints the forehead of the candidate with Sacred Chrism, saying:

“N., BE SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

*The newly confirmed responds, “AMEN”*

The Bishop says “PEACE BE WITH YOU.”

*The newly confirmed responds, “AND WITH YOUR SPIRIT.”*

A sign of peace is exchanged between the bishop and the newly confirmed.

4. Suggested Prayers of the Faithful are in the Ritual of Confirmation. While a deacon ordinarily offers the petitions, the pastor may permit the newly confirmed or other ministers to present them. It

is typical to speak the Prayers of the Faithful (Universal Prayer) from the ambo. A special petition for an increase in priesthood and religious vocations should be included.

## **SUMMARY**

Effective sacramental preparation should encourage parents, sponsors and candidates to be informed and committed to a lifelong process of catechesis. Witnessing to the Gospel means to live our Baptismal vows. The Sacrament of Confirmation helps us to recognize and use our gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit.

## **CONCLUSION**

We need to adapt our preparation programs to the needs, age and circumstances of the candidates. These policies regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation are our current norms in the Diocese of Dallas.

# Sacramental Guidelines

Diocese of Dallas  
2012

Pastoral Instruction  
on the  
Sacrament of Marriage

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sacred Scripture is filled with references to love, relationships, marriage and family. The Church itself is, in a spiritual manner, the family of the Lord. The self-giving love of God is mirrored in married life, which according to St. Paul, is also an image of the self-sacrifice of Christ. The first public miracle of Christ took place at a wedding feast in Cana. This event demonstrates the love and concern that Christ has for others, and for their relationships and commitments to one another, especially in marriage. The Catholic Church, reflecting the love of Christ for relationship and commitment between a man and a woman, has elevated the married life to a spiritual calling of self-giving love and of cooperating with God's creation of new life. The Sacrament of Matrimony properly lived fulfills the teaching of Christ that one man and one woman bonded by God in love should not be divided.

## **PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We understand that God has established marriage as the basis of human society. The natural right to marry is up-held by the Church (canon 1053). It is necessary that those who wish to marry possess the capacity to enter into marriage and to fulfill its responsibilities and obligations. This demands a high level of maturity and understanding on the part of both partners as well as an appreciation of what they are undertaking. There is no aspect of human life that is not touched by marriage and the family. Therefore, it is vital that persons entering marriage be well prepared to undertake this vocation.

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. Instruction on Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation begins in the context of family life, educational and social experience, and religious formation. The preaching and catechesis of the Church should impart an understanding of the sacredness of marriage and family life. The lifelong choice of marriage needs to be fostered and enriched by the sacraments and continuing catechesis. It is the privilege of the Catholic Church to assist couples in preparing to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The task for members of the Catholic Church, whether they are seeking to enter into marriage or are assisting those who wish to marry, is to come to a better understanding of marriage, and reflect prayerfully on its responsibilities.

## B. Marriage

Often engaged couples are more interested in making plans for their wedding than in working on changing or improving their relationship.

Because the Church upholds the sanctity of marriage as a permanent life-long commitment of fidelity and the core of the family, the ministers of the Church cannot neglect their duty of making careful inquiries to ensure an engaged couple respects and appreciates the commitment they are considering. Strong emphasis should be made on the process of *becoming married*, as well as entering into marriage. The couple must be encouraged to take into account the long-range dimensions of marriage and not focus solely on the limited event of the actual ceremony.

## C. Sacramental Enrichment

The couple should prepare themselves for marriage through regular attendance at the Eucharist and involvement in their parish of registration. Such involvement should include prayer together as a couple as well as participation in the life of their parish. In keeping with the Church law (canon 1065.2), it is strongly recommended that

those to be married approach the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist beforehand.

#### D. Sacredness of Marriage

Marriage is sacred by divine institution. Marriage also is sacred because of the uniqueness of each spouse as God's creation (see *Gaudium et Spes* n. 10 and 13). Each marriage is as unique as each person who enters marriage is unique. In the case of the marriage between two baptized Christians, the marriage is a Sacrament. If only one of the spouses is baptized, it is nevertheless a true bond of marriage though non-sacramental. Holiness still is imparted to both spouses and their children. (1Cor. 7:14).

#### E. Right to Marry

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*<sup>2</sup> hold that all persons can marry who are not prohibited from doing so by law. However, the law does not presume a readiness for marriage on the part of all who request it. Even if there is no legal obstruction to a couple's right to marry, they need to be assisted in assessing realistically their readiness to marry each other and the demands and potential difficulties that lie ahead.<sup>3</sup>

The immediate responsibility for determining that nothing prohibits a person from marrying is the individual's proper pastor. That would be the pastor of the Catholic party or the pastor of one of the Catholic parties. If the couple receives permission from the proper pastor for another priest or deacon to witness the marriage, the preparation and paperwork can be supervised by that priest or deacon.

The priest, deacon or lay minister who is helping the couple prepare for marriage must meet, in person, with the couple to help in their catechesis for marriage and to discuss the requirements as well as results of their instructional program. Usually, this presumes more than one meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* is intended as from 1983 (Canon or canons) and the *Code of Canon Law for Oriental Churches* is designated CCEO.

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), from *Norms for Marriage Preparation*, 1°. For future reference, simply *Norms*.

To begin, the presumption is in favor of a couple being capable of marriage, until the contrary becomes evident. Couples ought to be refused marriage only when they explicitly and formally reject what the Church intends to do in marriage. The Church expects the pastor to be “morally certain” the prospective spouses are capable of a valid marriage and intend such.

Instead of merely being dismissed, couples who clearly are not ready to enter marriage are to be given every assistance and support in order to enter marriage later in a fruitful way. If an impediment necessitates refusal or delay because it cannot be dispensed, this problem must be met head-on and immediately. The couple needs honesty about the situation and the realistic prospect of its resolution.

#### F. Advance Preparation for Marriage: Minimum Six Months

A couple should approach the parish at least six months before the anticipated wedding date. This time frame is to accommodate the time needed to complete all the aspects of preparing for marriage. It is not a canonically mandated time frame.

Persons who approach the parish for marriage are to be treated with respect, openness and warmth. This is true whether or not they are registered in the parish and regardless of their faith development.

The purposes of the initial interview are: to establish rapport with the couple and begin to know them; to explain the marriage preparation process; and to determine freedom to marry according to civil and Church law.

At this first session, an arrangement for the couple’s completion of a marriage assessment instrument (FOCCUS in the Diocese of Dallas) should be made. The number of sessions with a trained priest, deacon or lay minister preparing a couple for marriage will vary from parish to parish and circumstances regarding the engaged couple.

At some point, a review of the assessment instrument (FOCCUS) is needed. Sponsor couples or other ministers should be trained to incorporate the FOCCUS into their marriage preparation meetings. When the assessment instrument indicates unresolved issues, special

care must be exercised in order to motivate the couple to consider more seriously their readiness to marry.

## **II. TO GET MARRIED**

### **A. Who's Pastor?**

The proper pastor of a Catholic party is the pastor of the territorial parish in which that Catholic resides (canons 102-107).<sup>4</sup> If the Catholic party belongs to a personal parish (usually an ethnic, ritual or military designation; canon 518), the Catholic party can approach his or her personal pastor (canon 1110) or the pastor in the parish in which he or she resides. In the case of two Catholics who reside in different parishes, the parties can approach either pastor (canon 1115).

Registration in the parish in which a person is domiciled is not necessary for the person to discuss with the parish minister the reception of sacraments. If a pastor accepts the registration of a person, whether or not he/she is domiciled within the parish boundaries, it is presumed that the parish will assume responsibility for assisting the person to receive the sacraments.

When a couple resides in a local parish but will be married in another diocese, the preparation will usually take place locally and under the guidance of the Catholic party's pastor. It is possible a couple might be able to complete their preparation for marriage in another diocese under the guidance of the priest or deacon who is to witness the exchange of promises or Marriage.

### **B. Freedom to Marry**

A fundamental law regarding marriage is that each of the parties must be free to marry.<sup>5</sup> An investigation is made to protect both parties and the faith community.

Each party is asked to produce certain documentation:

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<sup>4</sup>A marriage involving an Eastern Rite Catholic may call for a different arrangement. The Tribunal will assist in determining what authorizations might be needed (CCEO canon 830, §1).

<sup>5</sup>The couple must be in compliance with appropriate civil law

- Baptized Catholics should present recently issued annotated baptismal certificates from their churches of baptism.
- Other baptized persons should present baptismal certificates or other official baptismal records from their churches of baptism.
- Both baptized Catholics and other baptized persons should present affidavits from parents or others (older siblings or other relatives) attesting to their freedom to marry.
- Unbaptized persons need furnish only affidavits from parents or others (older siblings or other relatives) attesting to their freedom to marry.

Thus, from the Church's perspective, the actual preparation and assessment comprise the majority of time and energy before a wedding.

### C. Marriage Preparation

A diocesan-approved process is the means through which the couple can fulfill the requirement to participate in a structured marriage preparation process (e.g., Engaged Encounter, Sponsor Couple, etc.). Some parishes have sufficient resources so they can offer a program parallel to the diocesan programs. The parties also can attend similar programs in other dioceses to which they have access. The Process must be approved by the office of Marriage Ministries.

Couples must participate in some premarital preparation program, **which has been approved by Ordinary of the diocese**. The process *FOCCUS For The Future* should also be completed.

Instruction in Natural Family Planning is expected, and available through diocesan-wide programs and at regional training sessions.

### D. Impediments (natural and divine) to Marriage

Impediments prohibit the contracting of marriage. If a marriage should be contracted without a dispensation from an impediment, it is invalid.

In those cases in which the impediment is from natural or divine law, the impediment is considered absolute and outside the Church's authority to dispense or remove. In those cases in which the basis of the impediment is from the Church's discipline, a dispensation may be

possible. In the case of each dispensation from an impediment, the discretion lies with the diocesan bishop or the Holy See.

The following impediments are outside the Church's power to dispense:

- Previous bond of a valid marriage (ligamen) (canon 1085, §1; CCEO canon 802, §1)
- Perpetual physical or psychic impotence (canon 1084, §1; CCEO canon 801, §1)
- Consanguinity among progenitors and siblings (canon 1091, §§1-2; CCEO canon 808, §§1-2)
- Parent or Sibling by Legal Adoption (canon 1094; CCEO canon 812)
- Public propriety (parent or sibling of common law or concubinage) (canon 1093; CCEO canon 810)

The following impediments can be dispensed only by the Apostolic See (the Holy Father)<sup>6</sup>:

- Holy Orders (canon 1087; CCEO canon 804)
- Public Perpetual vow of chastity (canon 1088; CCEO canon 805)
- Crime arising from the intentional killing of a spouse (canon 1090; CCEO canon 807)

The diocesan bishop of Dallas or his delegates can dispense the following impediments:

- Cousins by blood (First for canon 1091, §§2-3; and Second for CCEO canon 808, §3)
- Affinity among "in law" relationships (canon 1092; CCEO canon 809)
- Non-baptism of a spouse (disparity of worship) (canon 1086, §1; CCEO canon 803, §1)
- Spiritual relationship arising from Baptism (canon 811, §1)
- Age (14 for baptized girl and 16 for baptized boy) [canon 1083, §1; CCEO canon 800, §1]<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Canon 1078.

<sup>7</sup> "Given the high failure rate in marriages of the very young, and given the possibility that even at ages of sixteen and fourteen the parties may not have sufficient discretion of judgment for valid consent, a dispensation from this impediment should be given very rarely and then only for the most serious of reasons." Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, *The Canon Law: Letter and Spirit* (1995), p. 598. Thus, the policy of the Diocese of Dallas and the Ecclesiastical Province of San Antonio does not grant dispensations from this particular impediment.

- Abduction of the bride (canon 1089; CCE canon 806)<sup>8</sup>

All requests for a dispensation are addressed to the diocesan bishop of the Catholic party or to either bishop if both are Catholics. Even in those situations in which a Catholic party is celebrating the wedding in another diocese, a dispensation from an impediment would be granted by his or her own diocesan bishop. In the Diocese of Dallas, all requests for a dispensation from any impediment are sent to the Tribunal.

#### E. Confirmation

Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation are the Initiation Sacraments. A Catholic might seek the sacrament of Matrimony without having received the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Church encourages such a Catholic to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before getting married. Failure to do so, however, is not a cause for denying or delaying a wedding.

#### F. Wedding Arrangements

Weddings may be celebrated on any day of the week. However, the Church's calendar does not allow for the celebration of a marriage, even if there will be no Mass, on Ash Wednesday and Holy Saturday. The diocesan Office of Worship may be contacted as a resource for scheduling a wedding.

In this diocese, Catholic weddings normally are to take place in the proper parish of the bride or groom. The general norms for liturgical celebrations are to be followed at a wedding liturgy. Consequently, certain days of the year restrict the selection of readings at a Nuptial Mass. The liturgical books specify whenever there is a restriction.

The wedding of two Catholics should occur during a Mass. However, for a reasonable cause the wedding can be celebrated without Mass. When a Catholic and another baptized Christian marry, care should be taken to emphasize unity and to minimize division. For this reason, the usual practice is for the wedding to be celebrated without a Mass. Any

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<sup>8</sup> "Although the local ordinary can dispense from this impediment, since it is not reserved [to the Holy See], it is not easy to see what circumstances would justify him in doing so." *Ibid.*, p. 606.

exception would be made by the pastor of the parish. When a Catholic and a non-baptized person marry, the wedding is to be celebrated without a Mass. A Catholic wedding in a Catholic church must be celebrated by a priest or deacon who has authority to do so by law or by delegation (canon 1108 and CCEO canon 828). In the Diocese of Dallas while a minister from the tradition of each party may be present at the wedding, only Catholic clergy may receive the vows of both parties within the Catholic Church (canon 1127 §3 and CCEO canon 839).

With the dispensation from canonical form, it is possible for the wedding to take place in a church or facility other than a Catholic Church. However, such arrangements/locations require the approval of the diocesan bishop, through the tribunal. In the Diocese of Dallas, a Catholic priest or deacon may be present but, his participation is limited only to offering a blessing for unity. He may not receive the vows in a non-Catholic church setting.

The Church allows cultural adaptations within the liturgy as long as the adaptations are in keeping with the nature and spirit of the liturgy.

#### G. Witnesses

The law of the Church requires that two witnesses be present to affirm that the wedding vows have taken place. The witnesses should be aware of their role and possess the qualities that would set a good example for the married couple. However, this is not the requirement of the Church as found in canon 1108. Sensitivity about this matter should be exercised as many weddings are of mixed religion and as the bride and groom expect to be represented by the participation of their family and friends.

#### H. Fees

The parishes may need to encourage a particular “reservation” or “usage fee”. This fee allows the parish to set its calendar fairly as many people are making requests. This is a sensitive issue and people need to understand from the outset what is expected of them. The parish fees should be reasonable and not exorbitant. Pastoral ministers and staff need to be ready to make exceptions for those of modest means. The Church has always forbidden demanding payment for sacraments and

discouraged giving the impression that sacred things are for sale (canon 848).

Fees may not be requested by the celebrant of a sacrament, but the people are free to make a gift to the priest, the deacon or to those who assist at the altar, and/or to the parish. Fees may be requested for classes and other things outside the sacrament itself. Musicians are entitled to reasonable payment, as this is not a needed part of the sacrament.

#### I. Second or Previous Marriages

A couple planning to marry in a circumstance when one or both were previously married must contact their pastor, or with his permission, another priest, deacon, or lay minister to begin the preparation for presentation of the case to the tribunal. No marriage date, even tentative, is to be established until the parties have in hand, free from any canonical restrictions, a definitive decree from the tribunal.

In these circumstances, the minister is to determine whether or not the party/ parties previously married have discharged the responsibilities arising from the natural law toward a previous spouse and any minor children (canon 1071, 3<sup>o</sup>). If a remarriage is to occur, the couple is to complete a marriage preparation program or receive counseling appropriate to their circumstances.

#### J. Delay of the Celebration of a Marriage or Denial to Witness the Marriage

A wedding can only be delayed or denied for a just and probable cause. If an impediment exists that cannot be dispensed, there is nothing that can be done until the impediment no longer exists. A wedding date cannot be set until the impediment ceases.

If the pastor judges the pending wedding as imprudent and ill advised, gentle persuasion is to be used to dissuade a couple from marrying. Pastoral advice to the couple includes letting them know the reasons for the caution and, if appropriate, assisting them to approach marriage at a later time.

The imposition of a temporary prohibition to marry is not an unjust infringement on the rights of the prospective spouses if it is done under the proper conditions and with the overall welfare of the spouses and the community in mind. Church law obliges pastors to respect the engaged couple, even if that means declining to witness their marriage.

#### K. Due Process

When a priest or deacon cannot in good conscience witness a marriage, after consultation with the pastor and other members of the marriage preparation team and after talking personally with the engaged couple, he is to inform the couple of his intention to delay the marriage ceremony.

Because the right to marry derives from the natural law, a process of appeal does exist in order to safeguard the right of a couple to marry and to protect the priest or deacon's right either to delay or to refuse to witness the marriage. An informal resolution is preferable. Recourse to the tribunal can be made if necessary.

### III. SITUATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

If the couple is dealing with religious differences, premarital pregnancy or possible addiction, they deserve more individual attention.

In some cases the Church requires a dispensation or permission from the diocesan bishop through the tribunal. The pastor would serve as the first consultant on these issues, or the deacon who is ministering to the couple.

#### A. Interchurch and Interfaith Marriages

Interchurch marriages are those between a baptized Catholic and a baptized Christian of another tradition. Interfaith marriages involve a baptized Catholic and someone who has never been baptized in any faith.

The priest, deacon or lay minister must help the engaged couple to respect each other's traditions and faith experiences.

If a Catholic is going to marry an unbaptized person, a dispensation from disparity of worship must be granted (canon 1086, §2 and CCEO canon 803). Otherwise, the marriage is invalid. If a Catholic is going to marry a baptized Christian from another church, permission is needed (canon 1124 and CCEO canon 813).

Dispensations or permissions are never given without the Catholic party's making promises regarding his or her own practice of the Catholic faith and regarding sharing that Catholic faith with all the children born from this union (canon 1125 and CCEO canon 814). Under the current law, the party who is not a Catholic need make no agreement or sign any promises. However, he or she must be made aware that the Catholic party must do so.

## B. Pregnancy

A pregnancy is one of the most difficult situations to address in the context of marriage preparation. The motivation for marriage can become confused because of the sense of urgency. In spite of the press of time and other pressures on the couple and the minister, it is important to slow down the process so the best possible decisions can be made. For this reason, the guidelines for the San Antonio Province and the Diocese of Dallas require a priest, deacon or lay minister to obtain the permission of the diocesan bishop through the tribunal before proceeding with a wedding under such circumstances.

In the case of a couple who never intended or planned to marry prior to the pregnancy, marriage most likely is not an appropriate solution to the immediate situation.

If a couple already has set a wedding date or is engaged prior to the pregnancy, marriage is possible. Likewise, before cancelling any already scheduled wedding, because the couple informs you they just have learned they are pregnant, contact the Tribunal to discuss the situation. It is a serious matter, on the part of the pastor, to cancel any already scheduled wedding; thus consultation with the Tribunal is appropriate. The critical measure is the discernment of the couple's readiness for marriage. The marriage preparation process and the use of the evaluation instrument assist the pastor in determining whether

request for permission for the wedding to occur is submitted to the tribunal.

C. Sensitivity to Persons with Disabilities and Those with Special Needs

Particular care and sensitivity should be exercised when those who are physically, mentally or emotionally challenged seek to marry in the Church. Each situation must be assessed individually and a determination made through appropriate counseling. Similar concern is also warranted in cases involving chemical dependency. The FOCCUS pre-marriage instrument is invaluable for use in these situations.

D. Youthfulness

Special care and concern must be taken with any couple in which one or both parties are under the age of 18 since the Diocese of Dallas rarely grants permission for such marriages.

The pastor is not merely to suggest minors postpone their wedding but is to urge that they do so (canon 1072). If the couple rejects the pastor's admonitions, the diocesan bishop through the tribunal will make the final decision.

E. Cohabitation

The circumstance of cohabitation of couples before marriage is not uncommon in our society. During the course of marriage preparation the cohabiting couple should be given the opportunity to understand the Church's moral teaching about sexuality and sacramental marriage. They should also be given the opportunity to understand the negative impact of cohabitation upon their relationship. The couple might be challenged to separate before the wedding or at the very least to abstain from sexual activity if that has been a part of their relationship. In the Diocese of Dallas, since cohabitation is not a diriment impediment, marriage in the Church should not be refused on the basis of cohabitation alone. The entire matter of cohabitation should be approached with great pastoral responsibility and care by all involved in preparing couples for marriage. It should be demonstrated pastorally that cohabitation is not a rehearsal for becoming married.

## F. Convalidation

Couples attempt marriage for all sorts of reasons. However, the Church is not obliged to convalidate each of those marriages without critical review.

Each couple needs to be treated on a case-by-case basis. The reason for the “marriage” outside the Church likely will suggest which preparation and precautions need to be taken in an individual case.

As far as preparing a couple for convalidation of their civil or common-law union, they should be spiritually formed and catechetized as any other couple who wishes to marry in the Church.

As sometimes happens, a couple may not be able to enter fully into the preparation of their marriage. This situation can arise because one of the spouses (Catholic or not) is not inclined to make the effort required to celebrate a convalidation. At other times, one or both of the parties are unable to appreciate that their “marriage” is invalid so far as the Catholic Church is concerned.

It is very important for couples in search of regularization of their invalid marriages to spend time in reflection, prayer, and preparation before entering into marriage in the Church.

## G. Particular Preparation For Convalidation

The recommended process consists of participation in *Living Your Marriage as a Sacrament* or *Viviendo Su Matrimonio Como Sacramento*, a one-day workshop sponsored by the diocesan Office of Marriage Ministries. Incorporated into these two workshops is the use of **REFOCCUS**,<sup>9</sup> an excellent resource tool for marriage enrichment.

In the event a couple is unable to attend the above mentioned workshop, it is the responsibility of the pastor, other priest, deacon, lay minister or sponsor couple to facilitate the REFOCCUS process as part of a parish-based convalidation program. It is important that those administering REFOCCUS be trained to do so. It is particularly important for the pastor, other priest, deacon or lay minister to assist the couple in

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<sup>9</sup> (Relationship Enrichment Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study)

identifying unresolved issues, which may be present in the couple's union. If such issues are identified, professional counseling and assistance may be recommended.

#### H. Prenuptial Agreements

The legal community has created prenuptial agreements with the primary purpose of protecting or preserving an individual's material wealth.

An engaged couple involved in a prenuptial agreement must submit it to the tribunal for consideration of its potential effect on the validity of their proposed marriage.<sup>10</sup>

#### I. Second or Previous Marriages

A person who is Catholic or a person who is wishing to marry a Catholic must provide proof no earlier marriage binds or applies to him/her. Such proof may come in one of the following ways:

- An affidavit of never having been married previously.
- A certified death certificate of the previous spouse.
- A declaration of invalidity by a court of the Catholic Church, which has been duly ratified or confirmed by a second instance court and for which all stipulations placed by either court have been fulfilled.
- A decree allowing the use of the Pauline Privilege.
- An Apostolic rescript for a Petrine Privilege.
- An Apostolic dispensation from an unconsummated marriage.

***No wedding date can be set when there is an unresolved prior bond.***

#### J. Non-Canonical Marriages

Catholic clergy are not allowed to simulate the blessing of a civilly contracted marriage. They may participate only in a canonically approved marriage or convalidation ceremony.

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph B. McGrath, "The Effect of Pre-Nuptial Agreements on the Validity of Marriage," *The Jurist* 53 (1993):385.

## CONCLUSION

These policies are the current norm in the Diocese of Dallas in conformity with Liturgical Law and Canon Law. This document is intended to be adapted in the face of future developments as necessary to fulfill the purpose of marriage formation.

Marriage presupposes a special kind of commitment by spouses to each other and to the community. In addition, the marriage of a baptized man and a baptized woman constitutes a sacrament as well and provides the grace that flows from Christ's death and resurrection. Therefore, the couple's preparation for marriage is significant.

The prenuptial investigation must be made with dispatch, but without undue haste, because no firm wedding date can be set without proof of the parties' freedom to enter into marriage.

## APPENDIX

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of Canon 1067 and with due regard for Canon 1068, adopted eight norms to be observed in the preparation of a couple for marriage. These norms became effective for all Latin rite dioceses in the United States on December 1, 2000.

1. The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop.
2. Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry;
3. A Baptized Catholics should present a recently issued annotated baptismal certificate;
4. Additional documentation (such as affidavits of parents, older siblings and other older relatives) attesting to a Catholic party's freedom to marry should be presented;
5. Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry;
6. Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry.
7. Preparation for marriage should be in conformity with the prescriptions of 83CIC c. 1063 (regarding what must precede marriage) and 83CIC cc. 1064, 1071, 1072, 1086, §2, and 1125, which entrust certain situations to the special care of local ordinaries.
8. Preparation for marriage should be in compliance with appropriate civil laws.

## RESOURCES

To further assist the preparation process, the following resources are available:

1. FOCCUS, REFOCCUS, FOCCUS FOR THE FUTURE
2. Marriage Preparation, Education and Skill building processes
3. Natural Family Planning

Information regarding Marriage Preparation Programs may be obtained by calling the Office of Marriage Ministries at 214-528-2360 or by visiting web site: [www.cathdal.org/marriage\\_ministries.htm](http://www.cathdal.org/marriage_ministries.htm)

See also [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org) (For Your Marriage is an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) for helpful information and support.

## **FOCCUS** **(Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study)**

**FOCCUS** is a self-diagnostic inventory designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their unique relationship. It is not a test or predictor of success or failure in marriage. It is a tool to help couples identify and work through issues before marriage.

**FOCCUS** provides individualized couple feedback on where each party stands regarding topics important to marriage. The results of the inventory point to issues that may need to be addressed.

**FOCCUS** is designed to be used at three levels.

The first level of **FOCCUS** occurs when the individuals read and respond to the **FOCCUS** statements.

The second level of **FOCCUS** occurs with the help of a trained facilitator. Using the couple report, the facilitator works with the couple to look at patterns in their responses, discuss issues and solve problems.

The third level of **FOCCUS** involves referrals of two kinds. The first referral, specialized assistance, is not needed by every couple. The second referral, to educational or skills-training programs and processes, builds on the awareness couples have after completing the first two levels of **FOCCUS**. These educational and formation processes can be recommended as appropriate.

The **FOCCUS** content covers the range of aspects and elements necessary for a successful marriage. Additional content for special needs is included for dual career, interfaith and cohabiting couples.

**FOCCUS** reflects the values and ideals of marriage as sacred. It is easy to use for both engaged couples and those helping to prepare them for marriage.

It is strongly recommended that all engaged couples complete the **FOCCUS** process, preferably prior to participating in any marriage preparation process.

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**REFOCCUS**  
**(Relationship Enrichment Facilitating Open Couple Communication,  
Understanding and Study)**  
*An Instrument for Marriage Enrichment*

**Why REFOCCUS?**

A marriage has many seasons. The couple who know what season they are in and who understand that season's characteristics and challenges will probably weather that season very well. **REFOCCUS** is a self-diagnostic tool that can help a couple determine where they are right now.

Marriage is not fixed state; it is an ongoing process. A healthy couple will build five, ten, twenty different marriages with each other in the course of a lifetime commitment. That process of building new marriages usually happens around family and personal transition times, stages of life development, the ages of children, economic and job changes, failures and disappointments. This is both exciting and challenging. Couples who know that they are in process and have managed the process before will be affirmed in their growth. **REFOCCUS** calls on a couple to acknowledge and examine the processes that they have known; it helps them communicate about the process of growth/change that each is experiencing. It helps them own the process.

Every 10,000 miles or two years, whichever comes first, a couple needs to **STOP** and take stock of who and where they are in their relationship. **REFOCCUS** is designed to be used by the couple over and over again. The responses each makes are for this point forward. They are not some absolute indicators of their permanent relationship. The responses indicate a) what needs discussing today, b) what the couple has achieved that can be celebrated, c) what is somewhat awry that could benefit from time and attention.

The REFOCCUS Guide is designed to be used by a married couple, in a group setting, as a resource for enrichment for marriage ministry facilitating couples or as a follow-up to other marriage enrichment opportunities.

It is strongly recommended that any couple seeking validation of civil, common-law unions as well as those celebrated outside the auspices of the Catholic Church complete the REFOCCUS process as a part of the preparation for their new statement of intentions.

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## **MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROCESSES**

***Engaged Encounter Weekend Experience*** – a weekend workshop for English language couples preparing for or discerning marriage. It is designed to give couples an opportunity to dialogue honestly and intensely about their future life together.

***Encuentro Para Comprometidos*** – Spanish Language workshop equivalent to above.

***Living Your Marriage as a Sacrament*** – a one-day preparation process for couples seeking to validate civil union; that is those that occurred outside the auspices of the Catholic Church, including common law or informal union marriages.

***Viviendo Su Matrimonio Como Sacramento*** – Spanish workshop equivalent to above.

***In Faithful Love*** – Parish based couple-to-couple process. This preparation process consists of series of sessions/meetings with a trained married couple and engaged or discerning couple that provides a personal approach.

***Fieles En El Amor*** – Spanish equivalent to above process.

***FOCCUS*** – See information provided on previous page.

***FOCCUS For the Future*** – A summary and planning form for use at the completion of the marriage preparation process.

***REFOCCUS*** – See information provided on previous page. Especially helpful for couples seeking convalidation.

**For more information regarding the above processes,  
contact the Office of Marriage Ministries, 214.379-2881  
or visit [www.cathdal.org/marriage\\_ministries](http://www.cathdal.org/marriage_ministries)**

# Sacramental Guidelines

Diocese of Dallas  
2012

Pastoral Care of the Sick  
and the  
Sacrament of Anointing

## INTRODUCTION

The *Pastoral Care of the Sick* including the Rites of Anointing and Viaticum is part of the Church's total care and ministry to the sick and dying. Therefore, the Diocese of Dallas through her ministers expresses concern and compassion, and extends comfort and hope to the infirm. The diocesan church is present through personal visits, prayer, and the celebration of the Sacraments.

When the Church cares for the sick, it serves Christ himself in the suffering members of his Mystical Body. The Church shows this solicitude not only by visiting those who are in poor health but also by raising them up through the sacrament of anointing, by nourishing them with the Eucharist during their illness, and finally when they are in danger of death.

Priests have the special task of preparing the sick to celebrate the sacrament of Penance (individually or communally), to receive the Eucharist frequently if their condition permits and it will be especially helpful if the sick person, the priest, and the family become accustomed to praying together. The priest should provide leadership to those who assist him in the care of the sick, especially deacons and other ministers of the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup>

Ministers to the sick, and others who visit the sick, should provide encouragement for the sick to offer their suffering in union with Christ, for the Church and for difficulties in the world that we live in.

Pastoral care of the dying, including viaticum, is especially significant for the spiritual welfare of those who desire comfort and strength in the passage from this life to the peace of the Resurrection. The Church community has a responsibility to pray for and with those who are dying, and to commend them to the comfort of eternal life.

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<sup>11</sup> *Pastoral Care of the Sick, Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*. ICEL: Joint Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1983), para. 44.

## **I. COMMUNION TO THE SICK**

- A. Ministry to the sick is to be seen as an important, consistent ministry in every parish.
- B. It is the serious responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that the sick and aged be given every opportunity to receive Holy Communion frequently. In bringing them the Holy Eucharist, the Church manifests that special care and concern so frequently demonstrated in the Gospels.
- C. The priest, deacon, and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should also urge the sick to pray when they are alone, with their families or with those who care for them.
- D. When scheduling visits to the sick in which deacons and extraordinary ministers serve, the pastor should arrange that he, or another priest visit at least annually and when pastoral need arises.
- E. In taking the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, hosts should be carried in a pyx or other appropriate vessel carried on one's person and, as always, treated with the utmost reverence. The bearer of the Eucharist is to complete the visit without interruption. Care should be taken that any unused hosts are consumed or returned immediately to the tabernacle and not left in any other place for any period of time.
- F. The *Rite for the Pastoral Care of the Sick* indicates that sick people unable to receive under the appearance of bread may receive under the appearance of wine alone. Transporting the Precious Blood requires special care, using an appropriate container worthy of this purpose and which prevents any leakage. The minister should be reminded that even a particle of a consecrated host is fully and completely the Body and Blood of Christ, this may be preferable to transporting the Precious Blood.

## **II. ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

- A. The Sacrament of Anointing is the proper sacrament for those Catholics who have attained the use of reason and whose health is seriously

impaired by sickness or old age. Through this sacrament, the Church comforts and supports the person who is suffering and continues the healing ministry of Christ. This sacrament is described in the New Testament:

“Is there anyone sick among you? Let them send for the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick persons and the Lord will raise them up. If they have committed any sins, they will be forgiven him.” (James 5:14-15)

- B. In preparation for anointing a sick person, the priest should always provide an opportunity for sacramental confession and absolution.

### **III. SUBJECTS OF THE RITE**

- A. Any practice of the indiscriminate anointing of the sick is to be discontinued. Only those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age are proper subjects for the sacrament. Thus, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick is intended for the ‘seriously impaired,’ not for the persons who have reached a predetermined age (e.g., age 65). Age is not necessarily indicative of illness, and the practice of indiscriminately anointing numbers of people simply because they have reached an advanced age is to be avoided (n. 108, *Pastoral Care of the Sick*). Anointing of the sick as a gesture of Christian hospitality to those whose illness is not serious is equally inappropriate.

In summary, the following are proper subjects for this sacrament:

1. In ordinary circumstances, the Anointing of the Sick and Holy Eucharist are licitly administered to those of the Catholic faith.
2. Other Christians may be anointed in danger of death or in some other grave necessity, when, in the judgment of the bishop, they cannot approach a minister of their own denomination and provided they ask for the sacrament on their own, manifest a Catholic faith in it and are properly disposed. Canon 844 also allows the priest to administer the Sacrament of Anointing to members of the Oriental

Churches who do not enjoy full communion with the Catholic Church if they request this sacrament and are properly disposed.

3. The Sacrament of Anointing is to be conferred only on those who are alive. However, **canon 1005 directs that the sacrament be administered when there is any doubt about whether the person has in fact died.** In such a case, the priest should always give absolution and administer the Sacrament of Anointing. If death has just occurred, the person is to be given absolution and anointed.
  4. Those who are seriously ill, especially those who begin to be in danger of death due to sickness or old age.
  5. Those about to undergo surgery when a serious illness is the reason for the surgery.
  6. Seriously ill people if they fall into a more serious crisis during the same illness or, if after recovery, they develop a serious illness again.
  7. Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present.
  8. If there is doubt whether the person is seriously ill, the priest may anoint. Anointing of the Sick is not to be celebrated for those who are in danger of death but who are not seriously ill (e.g., a soldier going into battle), or for healthy people who are about to die from an extrinsic source (e.g., capital punishment). In both of these cases, the Sacrament of Penance and Holy Eucharist as Viaticum are the appropriate sacramental ministrations.
  9. Some types of mental sickness are now classified as serious. Those who are judged to have a serious mental illness and who would be strengthened by the sacrament may be anointed. The anointing may be repeated in accordance with the conditions for other kinds of serious illness.
- B. Children with serious illness can be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason. The use of reason is presumed once a child reaches the age of

seven. Small children under the age of reason are not considered as candidates for the Sacrament of Anointing. Rather, the priest should use the prayers, readings and blessings for sick children as presented in Chapter Two of *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*. However, if there is any doubt as to whether a seriously ill child has reached the use of reason, every benefit of the doubt is to be afforded and the child should be anointed.

- C. Those who once had the use of reason, but have subsequently lost their mental capabilities due to senility, unconsciousness, mental illness or some other reason should be anointed.

*Note: Many people suffer from chronic illness and degenerative disease, but are not threatened until the end stage of the disease: examples might include rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, celiac-sprue disease, and multiple sclerosis. Care must be taken in making the decision regarding sacramental anointing; the seriousness of the illness, or its escalation, should be given careful consideration.*

#### **IV. CELEBRATION OF ANOINTING**

- A. The Pastor should provide the faithful with instruction as to the conditions required for those to receive the sacrament. In this way, they may invite their friends, family, and neighbors who would benefit from reception of the sacrament.

#### **V. THE OIL OF THE SICK**

- A. The oil for anointing is a symbol of blessing, of strength, of healing, and of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Additional supplies of the Oil of the Sick may always be obtained from the Cathedral, or through the diocesan Office of Worship. However, in case of necessity, The *Rite for the Pastoral Care of the Sick* permits the priest to bless for that occasion, olive oil or other vegetable oil during the celebration itself.

#### **VI. PASTORAL CARE OF THE DYING**

- A. The rites in Part II of *The Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* are used by the Church to comfort and strengthen a dying Catholic in the passage from this life. The ministry to the dying places emphasis on trust in the Lord's promise of eternal life rather than on the struggle against illness, which is characteristic of the pastoral care of the sick.
- B. The ministry to the dying includes prayer, the Sacrament of Penance, the Rite of Viaticum, and commendation and prayers for the dead.

## VII. VIATICUM

- A. The Sacrament of Penance may be celebrated prior to the reception of Viaticum. The pastoral judgment of the priest must always be involved to determine whether to give absolution again later to a dying person.
- B. **Viaticum is food for the journey**, the passage through death to eternal life; it is distinct from the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. It is the proper sacrament for a dying Christian; the Sacrament of Anointing is the proper sacrament for a Christian who is seriously ill. However, the priest should feel free to repeat the Sacrament of Anointing together with the reception of Viaticum, especially if a long period of time has elapsed since the last anointing, and even more so if the person is dying from a more recent or different illness.
- C. One distinctive feature of the celebration of Viaticum is the Apostolic Pardon (formally known as the Apostolic Blessing) given by the priest either at the conclusion of the Sacrament of Penance or at the conclusion of the penitential rite. A second distinctive feature is the renewal of baptismal promises. These draw the dying person into a fulfillment of his/her Christian initiation, especially with the reception of communion. The Sign of Peace provides an opportunity for those present to embrace the dying person. The sense of leave-taking should not be denied during this time. It is a source of strength both for the dying and for those present, and can serve as a reminder of Christian hope that we will one day embrace each other again in heaven.

## **VIII. COMMENDATION OF THE DYING AND PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD**

- A. Scripture offers many verses, which console and strengthen the dying Christian. Scripture selections indicated in the ritual, as well as the prayers and litanies contained in the ritual, are particularly recommended. In the absence of a priest or deacon, it is strongly recommended that a family member lead in prayer those gathered around the dying person. The prayers are for the deceased as well as for the consolation of those present, and are a reiteration of the promise of Resurrection.
- B. Even if a person who has died has already been absolved and anointed, the family rightfully expects pastoral care from the priest. If at all possible, this involves a visit by the priest to the hospital to pray for the deceased, and to pray with the family and to console them. Prayers from the ritual are particularly recommended and appropriate for such occasions.

## **IX. RITES FOR EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

- A. “The exceptional circumstances for which these rites are provided arise when there is a genuine necessity, for example, when sudden illness or an accident or some other cause has placed one of the faithful in the proximate or immediate danger of death” (*The Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites for Exceptional Circumstances*, n. 232). In these circumstances, the priest is always to offer the Sacrament of Penance if the person is a Catholic or absolution to the person if they are unconscious. In some circumstances, the person may request baptism or full communion with the Catholic Church. For these and other exceptional circumstances, there are appropriate rites that are to be followed.

## CONCLUSION

These policies are the current norm in the Diocese of Dallas in conformity with Liturgical Law and Canon Law. This document is intended to be adapted in the face of future developments in parish life.

In using any of these Rites of Pastoral Care, a priest or minister from the Diocese of Dallas should use pastoral judgment to discern the spiritual needs of the sick or dying person, weighing the physical needs as medical personnel have advised.