

A COMMON MARRIAGE POLICY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

A Statement on Marriage Preparation
A Summary
May 2001

Modern Marriage

Marriage in our modern society should be a source of great joy for the husband and wife who live out their commitment to each other daily. It should also be the basis of stability for children who are nurtured by the love their parents share, both for each other and for them.

According to God's eternal plan, a man and a woman by a marriage covenant of conjugal love become one and give mutual help and service to each other through this intimate union of their persons and actions. That oneness, which is to grow daily more perfect, by its very nature has been destined for the procreation and education of children, who are the ultimate crown of the spouses' union.

It is for this reason that the church wishes to encourage, support and affirm all people who choose to enter into marriage by enabling them the opportunity to reflect upon their relationship and be fully aware of the resources and skills available to them to live out their lives together in intimacy and fulfilment.

For some couples this joy can turn into sadness and despair. It is a fact that many marriages, faced with overwhelming pressures are unable to provide an environment of love, stability and nurture for each other.

However support opportunities are available for couples who wish to develop and maintain a satisfying marriage. These include marriage and relationship education, marriage enrichment and counselling.

The task of building a stable and life giving marriage is one a couple must actively work at together throughout their life, beginning well before they are married.

Three stages of marriage preparation

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John II observed that preparation of young people for marriage and family life is "more than necessary in our times" and declared that "not only the family but also society and the church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities."

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John II describes three stages of preparation for marriage: the remote, the proximate, and the immediate. There is also the pastoral care for couples after the wedding.

Remote preparation begins 'in the womb' and proceeds through early childhood in wise family training. The proximate involves the preparation for the sacraments and the moral, religious, and personal formation of youth.

Thirdly, immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony "should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding, so as to deepen the meaning, content and form to the so called premarital enquiry by Canon Law."

Immediate preparation

The focus of this statement is the third stage – immediate preparation. Ideally couples should give twelve months notice of their intention to marry to the celebrant and the church. However, the minimum period of notice expected is six months.

Policy

It is the official policy of the Catholic Church that couples intending to celebrate their marriage in this community are to participate in formal Pre marriage Education.

This process involves both:

1. Pastoral Preparation for Marriage

This will involve:

- Interviews with the priest (or parish leader) who is to witness the marriage.
- Sharing time with the priest, either formally or informally exploring the meaning of commitment;
- An investigation of the Catholic understanding of marriage;
- The preparation of the wedding liturgy; and
- Completion of church and government paperwork.

2. Participation in a Pre-marriage Education Program

This will involve:

- Participation in a recognised group program, or inventory, and a discussion of the Church's understanding of marriage.
- Participation in a program delivered by trained facilitators who are committed to the Catholic understanding of marriage.
- It is recognised that this may be impossible in some exceptional circumstances, such as remote parishes.

It is important that couples are informed about these requirements in a positive and encouraging way. The concern of the church is for the well being and dignity of each couple.

Pastoral Care

The Church, through its priests and pastoral workers:

- Will be welcoming and affirming, prepared to listen to and walk with them in their journey towards marriage and beyond.
- Will complete the necessary church and government paperwork with the couple, and provide the couple with an understanding of marriage as a Sacrament.
- Will direct the couple to groups or organizations to enable them to participate in pre-marriage education.
- Will be nurturing and offer appropriate pastoral care.

The celebrant expects:

- That the couple will be prepared to participate in pre-marriage education as outlined in this policy.
- That the couple will spend time with the celebrant in a pastoral context.
- That the couple will be involved in discussion concerning their wedding liturgy.

As a church, we believe in the sacred union of marriage and will do all in our power to offer support, resources and pastoral care to couples who are preparing for, and living out their commitment to each other in marriage.