

# Diocese of Tyler

## Formation Guidelines for Couples Seeking Convalidation

*For couples who have been cohabiting less than 3 years, pastors are strongly encouraged to guide those couples through the full marriage formation program of the Diocese of Tyler. **The following recommended formation guidelines apply to couples seeking convalidation who have been cohabiting for more than 3 years.** We recognize that couples in this situation need formation for the sacrament that better addresses their experience and circumstances. The content, method, and time of formation for couples seeking convalidation may vary; however, **formation for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is still necessary.***

***A suggested formation time for couples seeking convalidation is 3-6 months.** Utilizing these formation guidelines, the pastor may determine that a couple is formed well enough to celebrate the sacrament sooner, or if the couple needs a longer period of formation.*

### **1. Meeting with the Priest**

The priest and the couple should meet to discuss the meaning and significance of a sacramental marriage, and to determine if there are any impediments that need to be resolved before the sacrament takes place. For assistance regarding annulments, please contact the Tribunal or the Cana Project.

This first encounter would also be a time for the priest to encourage the sacrament of reconciliation and a period of abstinence before the convalidation. The Family Life Office has a separate guide on specific questions and topics to discuss with the couple during that initial meeting. A copy of the guide is available at [www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife](http://www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife).

After their initial meeting(s), the priest will be able to make a pastoral decision on the kind of formation a couple needs and the appropriate amount of time they need to wait before celebrating the sacrament.

### **2. Pastors are encouraged to utilize the Witness to Love Civil Marriage Initiative couples seeking convalidation.**

The mentoring process is an excellent way to keep couples connected to the parish and to help them continue their formation after celebrating the sacrament.

### **3. When it is possible, the couple should take a Couple Inventory that assesses their relationship. The Diocese of Tyler recommends using the PREPARE-ENRICH Assessment.**

This will benefit both the couple (and the priest in charge of their formation) in better understanding where they are in their relationship. There is always an area in which a couple can improve their relationship, and this is a tool to help them identify those strength and growth areas.

- a. ***What if a couple cannot take the assessment due to levels of literacy or ability to complete the questionnaire?*** Mentor couples can be of help in this

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situation. One recommendation is that the husband and wife assist the couple taking the questionnaire by going through the questions and completing the questions with them (i.e. the men work together, and the women work together). Another recommendation is that the priest in charge of the couple's formation can use the Prepare-Enrich discussion guide to discuss the different areas of a couple's relationship.

#### 4. **Marriage Formation Retreat or Series of Formation Sessions**

There are two options available: **1) A Parish-based retreat day or series of formation sessions as approved by the Family Life Office** or **2) The *Three to Get Married Retreat*** offered by the St. Philip Institute Family Life Office. A formation day or series of sessions offered at the parish level offer the couple the opportunity to plug into a community of couples and receive mentoring at a level that best suits their situation.

**To receive approval from the Family Life Office, the parish-based formation days should include the following themes:**

- Sacramentality of Marriage (Why Marriage in the Church Matters)
- Communication & Conflict Resolution
- Sharing the Faith with Your Children (Raising Catholic Kids)
- Finances
- Couple Spirituality (praying with and for your spouse, praying as a family)
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation
- The Eucharist (Why Mass Matters)
- Sex & Marriage (Discussion on NFP and Church's Teachings on Sexuality and arrange a time to follow up with further information on NFP resources)

A list of parish approved formation days and retreats available around the Diocese and online are listed at [www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife](http://www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife).

#### 5. **Natural Family Planning Class (Intro or Full Course)**

**An NFP Course (at a minimum an Introductory class) is required for couples who are still in child-bearing years.** Pastors should consider sending *all* couples, even those who may be beyond child-bearing years, to at least an introductory course of NFP when it is available. Though they might not use it in their own lives, it is likely they will have the opportunity to share information with their family or friends.

- a. A schedule of NFP Classes available around the Diocese and online are listed at [www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife](http://www.stphilipinstitute.org/familylife).

#### 6. **Final Meeting(s) with Priest**

In the remaining 1-2 sessions with the couple the priest should use this as an opportunity to review themes covered during their formation, such as the purpose of the Sacrament of Marriage, Marital Consent, and Couple Spirituality. This would also be the time to collect any certificates of completion for formation retreat and NFP class,

plan the liturgy, and schedule the rehearsal.

**7. Sacrament of Reconciliation**

Schedule an opportunity for the couple to go to confession. Remember that this is particularly meaningful and necessary step for Catholic parties seeking convalidation. Celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony for them will also mean returning to the Eucharist. Use this opportunity to emphasize the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout their married life.