



JOSEPH EDWARD STRICKLAND
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE APOSTOLIC SEE
BISHOP OF TYLER

DECREE

Promulgating the Marriage Formation Process for the Diocese of Tyler

Among the many blessings that God has showered upon us in Christ is the blessing of marriage, a gift bestowed by the Creator from the creation of the human race. His hand has inscribed the vocation to marriage in the very nature of man and woman.¹

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong partnership which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized,² for it represents the union of Christ and His Church.³

So seriously does the Church see the importance of preparing and forming couples to embrace this sacred vocation, which is always free, total, faithful, and fruitful by its very nature,⁴ that she obliges her pastors to provide personal preparation to couples so that the spouses are disposed to the holiness and duties of their new state in life⁵ and so that the state of marriage may be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection.⁶ This is done by endeavoring to evangelize the couple's authentic and mutual love in light of our Catholic faith.⁷

Because this process of instructing couples in the fundamental elements of Christian teaching on marriage and the family is essential for a successful marriage, it is necessary to ensure that a formation program which offers couples the fullness and beauty of this teaching in a way they can receive and value is used, and that sufficient time is provided for suitable preparation for marriage⁸ and to ensure that nothing stands in the way of the valid and licit celebration of the sacrament.⁹

- More -

¹ Cf. Genesis 1:27-28, 2:21-24.

² Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC)*, can. 1055, §1.

³ Cf. Ephesians 5:21-6:4.

⁴ See *Humanae Vitae*, 8-9.

⁵ Cf. *CIC*, can. 1063, 2°.

⁶ Cf. *Order of Celebrating Matrimony (OCM)*, 14.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 20.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 15.

⁹ Cf. *CIC*, can. 1066; *OCM*, 19.

Therefore, considering my duty to regulate the preparation, celebration and pastoral care of the Sacrament of Matrimony in this territory¹⁰, and in virtue of my ordinary authority, I decree as follows:

1. A formational period of 9 to 12 months is normally required of all newly-engaged couples before celebrating the sacrament of matrimony.
2. A formational period of 3 to 6 months, at the discretion of the pastor, is suggested for couples who have entered marriage outside the Church before celebrating a convalidation of the sacrament of matrimony.
3. The program of formation to be used has been developed by the Office of Marriage and Family Life and a listing of the components is attached to this decree.

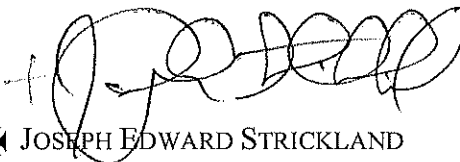
While fulfilling the formation requirements established by this decree, it must be kept in mind that each person, not bound by impeding obligations, is free to contract marriage.¹¹ Therefore, all those engaged in marriage formation ministry will strive sincerely to fulfill the rights of the faithful while providing them with marriage formation. Doing so will aid them in a lifetime of fidelity to the vocation of marriage.

The complimentary norms issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of canon 1067 and with due regard for canon 1068, shall also be observed in preparation of couples for marriage.¹²

The provisions of this decree are effective as of June 3, 2018, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

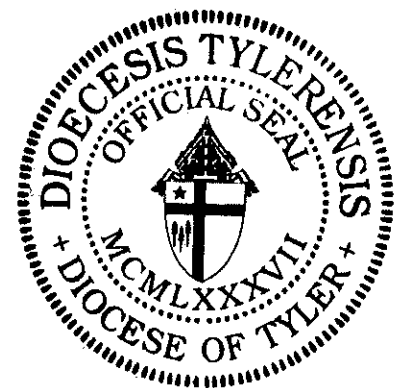
All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Tyler, at the Diocesan Curia, under my sign and seal, and the countersign of my Chancellor, on the 10th day of the month of May, the feast of St. Damien of Molokai, in the year of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2018.


✠ JOSEPH EDWARD STRICKLAND


Peyton Low
Chancellor

Prot. No.: 2018/C-0114



¹⁰ Cf. *OCM*, 12

¹¹ Cf. *CIC*, cc. 87, 1058, 1078.

¹² NCCB complimentary legislation for canon 1067, Oct. 20, 2000.

Formation Program for Newly-Engaged Couples (May 2018)

1. Call as soon as you get engaged. A member of the parish staff will schedule a meeting with you to discuss your wedding preparations as soon as possible.
2. Initial Meeting (9 months before wedding)
At this meeting, you'll learn about the formation process for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the necessary paperwork for your marriage, and set your tentative wedding date.
3. Couple Inventory (7-8 months before wedding)
The couple inventory provides you with a personalized profile of your relationship. Your parish will set this up for you, and upon completion, they will help you schedule the follow up session to review your results.
4. Witness to Love (7-8 months before wedding)
You will be asked to choose your own marriage mentor couple who will accompany you during your formation and throughout your first few years of marriage using the Witness to Love model. You will have several meetings with them in the time leading up to your wedding, and they will continue to be a support to you in the years to come!
5. Three to Get Married Retreat (6-7 months before wedding)
This retreat weekend will be an opportunity for you to grow closer to Jesus Christ and to one another. Here you will build on the topics you have discussed with your Pastor and your Mentor Couple, with a special focus on the theology of Catholic marriage and other teachings of our Catholic faith. The retreat schedule will be listed on the St. Philip Institute website.
6. Natural Family Planning (5-6 months before the wedding)
NFP respects the love-giving and life-giving purposes of marriage and enriches the bond between husband and wife. This course gives couples a natural approach to understanding the cycles of fertility and infertility. Course listings may be found on the St. Philip Institute website.
7. Final Meeting (2 months before the wedding)
This meeting will review your previous preparation, complete all your paperwork, and plan your wedding liturgy. You're getting close to celebrating this beautiful sacrament!
8. Sacrament of Reconciliation (1 week before the wedding)
Catholics preparing for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony are encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Reconciliation and the Eucharist are invaluable sources of grace and healing. Celebrate this sacrament with your spouse-to-be!

Recommended Formation Program for Marriage Convalidation (May 2018)

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 three 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.

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* mentor couple program, even with 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. Couples would not have to complete all the sessions *before* the sacrament is celebrated (as is the requirement for engaged couples). For example, three sessions could take place before the convalidation and the remaining 3 sessions could occur after that. The Family Life Office is currently working with *Witness to Love* to create a version of this program for couples seeking convalidation. In the meantime, the program can be utilized as is for couples seeking convalidation.

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 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 must 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 approved parish formation days and retreats available around the Diocese and online are listed at 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.

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.