

400 Sacrament Of Marriage

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In ministering to the engaged couple and in celebrating their marriage, the Church not only expresses its love and support for the couple, but acknowledges the value of their married life as a help to each other to attain holiness, and as a blessing for society and the life of the Church. In forming a family, they become a domestic church. By word and example they are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #11)

Because of the dignity and holiness of the vocation of Christian marriage, the Church has an obligation to do all that it can to preserve the sacredness of marriage and offer its members the guidance and support that will help to prepare a couple for their married life.

Parish ministers sometimes encounter couples who might not worship regularly or be fully catechized. Their notions of marriage may be more influenced by the media than by the Christian tradition. Furthermore, one of the partners may not be Catholic or Christian.

For many couples, marriage preparation is their first experience as adults of encountering Christ through the Church. They may come with disinterest, apprehension, misconceptions or unreasonable expectations. But their coming to the Church at this moment is in itself a movement of grace.

Parish ministers need to see in this occasion an opportunity for evangelization. A warm welcome and a genuine concern for their welfare may be a turning point in their lives as they encounter Christ from a new perspective. This demands patience and sensitivity and, above all, a love that can both challenge as well as rejoice with the couple preparing for marriage.

These policies and procedures cannot cover every possible situation pastoral ministers will encounter in serving the needs of the engaged. However, they are intended to give order and direction to our celebration of marriage in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

While respecting the personal and familial nature of each marriage celebration, the Church has an obligation, in the exercise of its teaching office, to lead and guide all the faithful to a truly Catholic understanding of marriage as a public act, a communal treasure, and a sacrament of the Church and for the Church.

The council fathers of Vatican II taught that “The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by Him with its own proper laws...God himself is the author of marriage” (Gaudium et Spes 48, n. 1). The Church teaches that marriage is a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. Through this marriage covenant, both a man and a woman enter a permanent relationship that is characterized by unity,

exclusivity, and indissolubility. A man and the woman marry by consenting to give and to accept each other through this irrevocable marriage covenant.