

As I Have Loved You



A Booklet for Engaged Couples

*Common Policy for Marriage Preparation
Archdiocese of Hartford*

A Publication of the
Hartford Archdiocesan
Office of Family Life



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
134 FARMINGTON AVENUE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
06105-3784

OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

Dear Engaged Couples,

As you embark on a new shared journey of faith and love, let the following beautiful truth from the *Catechism* serve as your guide: "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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1603). Marriage is a "covenant," a partnership between the spouses, lived with God's help, and as such it is a source of blessing and strength for them, for the children that God gives them, and for all of society.

The contents of this *Common Policy for Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese of Hartford* are meant as a help to you, and as a pledge of the Church's encouragement and support as you prepare for your shared vocation of husband and wife. I hope you will take full advantage of the opportunities offered, and find in them a source of strength in your relationship to one another and to God.

What is described here reflects the long experience of many married and engaged couples, priests, deacons, and marriage counselors. It was developed to make it possible for you to enter into marriage better prepared, more confident about your readiness to make a life-long vow of love and fidelity with the help of God.

You are now at the early stages of this experience that will unfold for the rest of your lives. Take heart from these words of Pope Francis to couples like you, preparing for marriage: "If," the Holy Father says, "love is a *relationship*, then it is a reality that grows, and we can also say, by way of example, that it is built up like a home...You are preparing to grow together, to build this home, to live together forever. You do not want to found it on the sand of sentiments, which come and go, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from God. The family is born from this plan of love, it wants to grow just as a home is built, as a place of affection, of help, of hope, of support. As the love of God is stable and forever, so too should we want the love on which a family is based to be stable and forever."

With these beautiful truths in mind, I want to assure you, on behalf of the Church in our Archdiocese, of our support and prayers. We join you giving thanks to God for the gift of the Sacrament of Marriage.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Leonard P. Blair*

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford

(860) 541-6491 / FAX (860) 541-6293

COMMON POLICY FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION

1. The minimum proximate preparation period for marriage will be about six months. This period of preparation should start when the couple first contacts the parish priest or deacon to set the wedding date.
(With this, as with the other parts of the marriage preparation policy, the parish priest/deacon, for good reason, can grant exceptions. All exceptions granted, however, must be exceptions from the letter of the law, but not for its spirit.)
2. Each couple, early in their marriage preparation will be given the F.O.C.C.U.S. or F.A.C.E.T. Premarital Inventory, including the *sacramentality* section developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha. This will be computer read and returned to the priest/deacon within three weeks.
3. Each priest/deacon will meet with the engaged couple a minimum of four times. At the first meeting, the marriage preparation program is explained; at the second, the Premarital Inventory is administered and other parish paperwork is completed; at the third and fourth, the results of the Premarital Inventory are discussed, an explanation of the sacramentality of Christian marriage is shared with the couple, and the details of the liturgy are developed.
4. Each engaged couple will attend a group experience, aimed at helping them gain insight into themselves, and their relationship (self-image, self-awareness, family and background differences, expectations, etc.), providing them with techniques for maintaining and enriching relationships (coping with stress, communication skills, resolving differences, making decisions, prayer, etc.), and providing the witness of married couples living the sacrament of marriage. Couples would be free to choose from the following group experiences:
 - A. Engaged Couples Conference offered by the deanery.
 - B. Engaged Encounter Weekend offered by the Archdiocese.
 - C. Engaged Couples Conference offered by their parish (where available).
5. In marriage where the parties belong to different religions, the priest/deacon should endeavor to be in contact and to cooperate with the minister or religious counselor in both the preparation for, and celebration of, the marriage ceremony.
6. Every couple, one of whom is not yet twenty years of age, will meet with a counselor from the Family Life Office to examine the particular issues of their young marriage. If the person is under 18, an evaluation report centering on the basic question of required maturity is to be sent to the parish.
7. Every couple, one of whom is entering a second marriage, is urged to participate in a program provided by the Family Life Office, dealing with the particular issues of second marriage.

8. Circumstances may arise which would necessitate more extended consultation and evaluation in determining a couple's readiness for Christian marriage. In such cases, the priest or deacon should delay the marriage, pending the outcome of such consultation and evaluation.

A. Circumstances can exist when:

1. The priest or deacon is convinced that one or both parties totally lack an understanding of, or a commitment to, the essential properties of Christian marriage, i.e. fidelity, permanence, and the right to children.
 2. The frank admission of the Catholic partners that they have not practiced and do not intend to practice their Catholic faith is strong enough to indicate that they reject explicitly and formally what the church intends them to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated (as opposed to simple neglect of the practice of faith.)
 3. The couple refuses to take part, in good faith, in the formal marriage preparation process.
 4. One or both parties are judged to be lacking in the minimal maturity demanded by Christian marriage.
 5. There is evidence of substantial and undue pressure to marry from external sources, i.e. parental pressure of premarital pregnancy.
- B. In all cases, it is important that the priest/deacon assist the couple to overcome their problem. If skills are required beyond those possessed by the priest/deacon, the couple should be referred to the appropriate professional persons. Every effort should be made to put the support program and resources of Archdiocesan agencies at the disposition of the couple.
- C. When the couple feels aggrieved by the decision to delay the marriage, or even to postpone it indefinitely, the priest or deacon will assist the couple in lodging an appeal to the Archbishop. The matter will normally be reviewed by the Chancery staff acting as the Archbishop's delegate and an answer will be given within two weeks.

9. This booklet on marriage preparation is to be given to each couple at their first meeting with the priest/deacon.

Please visit our Website for available conference and weekend dates:

<http://archdioceseofhartford.org/office-of-family-life/>

You may register by email at family.life.office@ahoct.org

**OFFICE OF FAMILY LIFE
ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
467 Bloomfield Ave.
Bloomfield, CT 06002
Phone: (860) 242 - 5573 Ext. 2690
Fax: (860) 242 - 0367**