**Marriage Preparation Document for Deacons**

**Touching on the sensitive topics**

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a sacred and lifelong covenant between a man and a woman.

As expressed in the Questions of Intent in the Rite of Matrimony, this requires:

* Freedom: "have you come here freely?”
* Total commitment: "… and without reservation"
* Self-giving love: "…to give yourselves to each other"
* Faithfulness: "will you love and honor each other as man and wife?"
* Permanence: "…for the rest of your lives"
* Fruitfulness: "will you accept children lovingly from God"

Unfortunately, our secular society ("the world") often does not support these principals, and engaged couples are exposed to very different messages as they prepare for, and then live out, their married lives. This document seeks to help the deacon to address these issues within the context of marriage preparation, through several brief papers, each with additional resources.

* More than likely during the course of your marriage preparation in the parish, you will encounter a woman or man who has taken part in an abortion. We must encourage dialogue between the couple where this situation exists, showing mercy and tenderness. In this way, the couple will have the **freedom** to give full consent with nothing hidden or blocking the total sharing of self, past, present and future. This is addressed in the section on Abortion.
* The majority of engaged couples are already living together before marriage, falsely believing this will help them prepare for a strong marriage. But this conditional relationship is contradictory to the **total commitment** theyare preparing to make. This is addressed in the section on Cohabitation.
* We must introduce the couple to God's Plan for marriage as a reflection of the **self-giving love** of the Trinity, the opposite of self-seeking love, or lust, so widely promoted by our hedonistic culture. This is addressed in the section on the Theology of the Body, "God's Plan for Marriage and Sexuality".
* **Faithfulness** is challenged by many factors, especially the lure of pornography, which many consider "harmless" or "victimless". But within a marriage, the use of pornography leads the spouses to treat each other as just objects to be used for sexual pleasure--destroying the love of the Covenant between the spouses and God.  This is addressed in the section on Pornography.
* Many couples who come to the Church to be married don’t really understand what they are asking from the Church. The deacon must present the Sacrament in a way that helps the engaged couple comprehend the **permanence** and grace of the state in the life that they are about to enter. This is addressed in the section on The Marriage Sacrament.
* The openness to children is a fundamental purpose of marriage and stems from the free, total, faithful giving of one spouse to another. If, indeed, the couple approaches marriage with confidence and trust in their spouse, the **fruitfulness** of children will be the natural result of the marital union. This is addressed in the section on Artificial Contraception.
* Finally, the need for **ongoing support** of the Catholic Community for young married couples is addressed in the section on Retaining Contact with Newly-Married Couples.

We hope that you will find these resources helpful, and we welcome your questions and feedback.

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