



At the Service of Communion

Instructions for the
Formation of Engaged or Civilly Married Couples
and the Accompaniment of Married Couples
in the Diocese of Cheyenne

February 14, 2022



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Introduction

To all ordained and lay ministers who accompany couples in their formation for the vocation of marriage, thank you! You exercise a tremendous responsibility in our Church. When the domestic Church flourishes the entire Church flourishes. Helping couples prepare for marriage and accompanying them after the celebration of matrimony helps form disciples who can proclaim Christ and attract others to the mysteries we celebrate as Church. Your ministry mirrors the words of Pope Francis, “The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.”¹

The following Instructions address priests, deacons, and laity who share in the responsibility of forming couples desiring to be married in the Catholic Church and of accompanying couples during the early years of married life.

Of special note, these Instructions prioritize the spiritual and human formation of couples so that the process of formation does not reduce couples or their formation to fulfilling an impersonal rubric of preparation. These instructions also aim to help couples remain open to formation so that they seek further formation and catechesis within their parishes or pastorates, which refers to a group of parishes and missions under the leadership of one pastor.

The instructions that follow guide the implementation of the requirements of Canon 1063:

Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by:

1. preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents;
2. personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state;
3. a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church;
4. help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family.

The Diocese of Cheyenne’s Office of Pastoral Formation will conduct regular reviews of these Instructions to evaluate their effectiveness. The first review will begin July 1, 2023, and future reviews will occur every three years following this date.

¹ *Amoris Laetitia*, 1.



Purpose

Even though the vocation of marriage has always had a central role in the health of the Church, we have nonetheless witnessed a decline in healthy, successful marriages over the past several decades. Among many other qualities, a healthy and successful marriage is one that couples freely enter, intend as a lifetime commitment, and in which they are open to children.²

To help couples succeed in their vocational discernments, the Diocese of Cheyenne extends its support to parish coordinators of these ministries. These ministries strive to foster spirituality, encourage regular participation in sacramental celebrations, develop healthy life and communication skills, and connect couples with other households in their parishes or pastorates.

This connection of couples serves not simply to create social ties within the family of faith, but rather manifests the Church's commitment of steadfast love to couples that will inspire them integrate this permanent commitment into the seasons of their own shared life and vocation. Moreover, it signifies the efficacy of the celebration of Eucharist, which deepens communion among all who participate.

Natural Family Planning features prominently among the teaching of life skills. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its presentation of "the regulation of births," discusses not only the methods that the Church calls Natural Family Planning but also how these "methods respect the bodies of spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom."³ These adjoining virtuous practices deserve their own attention in cultivating life skills, and they also allow couples to understand Natural Family Planning.

This renewal also aims to help ordained and lay ministers implement the Church's teaching about the sacrament of matrimony within their parishes or pastorates. The *Catechism* notes that matrimony and holy orders, "are directed toward the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God."⁴

The laity join with and support the clergy in their ministerial leadership in a practice of co-responsibility for these ministries. To help married mentor couples exercise this responsibility in the vision of *Amoris Laetitia*, the Diocese will also provide support and formation to local leaders so that mentor couples can exercise this co-responsibility for mission and provide models of joy-filled, Catholic marriages under the leadership of the clergy. Together we strive to form "churches that meet in homes" that develop from families' and individual's encounters with the Body of Christ in their pastorates.⁵ As Pope Francis writes, "A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table."⁶

² cf. *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 94.

³ CCC, 2370.

⁴ Ibid., 1534.

⁵ *Amoris Laetitia*, 15. cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; Col 4:15.

⁶ Ibid., 15.



Formation for Couples Before the Celebration of Matrimony

Context

Many couples who present themselves for marriage in the Church have not had mentorship or guidance in discerning the vocation that they desire to share with each other; truthfully, many may not even consider marriage as a vocation because they have not had the opportunity to explore their calls in the Church.

Additionally, couples bring popular cultural dispositions that shape how they approach faith. Pope Francis references the synod on the family to name this reality, for dominant cultural attitudes have led “individuals, in personal and family life, to receive less and less support from social structures than in the past.”⁷ This increasing lack of support from social structures means that the Church needs to be more prepared than ever before to teach and form people in a Catholic vision of married life. Additionally, “equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute.”⁸ The Church must teach that marriage is a life-giving communion that serves the wider communion of the Body of Christ; the vocation of marriage is not simply an agreement between two people.

Unfortunately, couples seeking marriage often do not expect accompaniment, and they might not know how to journey with each other. Through the guidance of clergy and mentor couples, those who desire marriage will have the opportunity to encounter the Body of Christ anew and build new habits of living, praying, and serving that reflect the God who loves us. Because of Christ, the Church is more than a “social structure.” Because of this mystery, we can help couples seeking marriage to re-shape the other social structures in which they find themselves.

⁷ *Amoris Laetitia*, 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.



Instruction

The following instructions will serve as the diocesan standard for use in parishes and pastorates to prepare couples for marriage in the Church.⁹

1. Components for Parish Leaders

- a. **Foundational Resource:** *Witness to Love* shall be the foundational resource for engaged couples as well as for clergy, parish coordinators, and mentor couples.
- b. **Forming Clergy and Mentor Couples:** To ensure that ministers have the best capability to guide couples in their formation, the Diocese of Cheyenne will require and coordinate training for all clergy and lay ministers in the use of *Witness to Love*. See “[Forming Clergy and Mentor Couples](#)” for the full description.

2. Components for Engaged Couples

- a. **Selection of a Mentor Couple:** Pastors will incorporate the volunteer ministry of mentor couples. This approach also presents an opportunity for mentors to deepen their bond with the Church and receive ongoing formation. *Witness to Love* offers thorough training for mentor couples and emphasizes the self-selection of mentors by the engaged couple, which could be done in two ways:
 - The engaged couple recommends to the pastor a mentor couple from the parish at-large according to the “[Profile for Mentor Couples](#).”
 - If the pastor does not wish for engaged couples to recommend a mentor couple from the parish at-large, then the Diocese will support parishes and pastorates in forming cohorts of designated mentor couples from which the engaged couple may choose. See more in “[Celebrating Ministers and Marriage Preparation Teams](#).”
- b. **Inventory:** Each couple is required to complete a pre-marriage inventory which must be reviewed with them by a mentor couple. The preferred resource is the FOCCUS, but pastorates may also use PREPARE/ENRICH. Both inventories align with the framework of *Witness to Love*. Pastors need not worry about difference in inventory between pastorates, as the formation and application surrounding them remains constant.
- c. **Natural Family Planning:** Those who wish to marry in the Church will complete a Natural Family Planning course, as will mentor couples. The Marriage Accompaniment page on the website for the Diocese of Cheyenne offers options for this element of formation; you may find a link to this page in the appendix. The pastor may grant an exception for a couple beyond child-bearing years. Couples will not have a requirement to chart.
- d. **Retreat:** Retreats create an opportunity for in-depth spiritual encounters for couples with Christ and the Church through prayer, conversation, and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. The engaged couple will select from one of three options:
 - Local retreat coordinated at the local parish or pastorate.
 - Deanery level retreat, which the Office of Pastoral Formation will help coordinate and identify funding, facilitator couples, and meeting spaces beginning Fall of 2022.
 - Annual diocesan family retreat, beginning the Summer of 2023.

⁹ These instructions and those that follow align *Witness to Love* to the values and metrics of [Vision 2030](#). Readers will recognize language from both sources in these instructions.



Formation for Civilly Married Couples Seeking Marriage in the Church

Context

St. John Paul II explains,

“For all of them the Church will have a word of truth, goodness, understanding, hope and deep sympathy with their sometimes tragic difficulties. To all of them she will offer her disinterested help so that they can come closer to that model of a family which the Creator intended from ‘the beginning’ and which Christ has renewed with His redeeming grace.”¹⁰

Pope Francis incorporates the reflections of St. John Paul II into his description of how to accompany those couples who live in situations that are called irregular.¹¹

Instruction

The following standards will guide the preparation for marriage for those who seek convalidation that has equal depth and attention to those who seek formation during engagement.

1. Components for Parish Leaders

- a. **Foundational Resource:** They will provide the Civil Marriage Initiative of *Witness to Love* for those seeking convalidation, recognizing that not all in this circumstance have a civil union.
- b. They will cultivate a pastoral sensitivity that seeks to understand why the couple now desires to celebrate the sacrament of matrimony. This pastoral sensitivity seeks to understand the couples’ faith journeys and how they came to this decision. Use of the phrase “irregular situation,” though a theological category, will not communicate the Church’s desire to communicate God’s mercy and could offend couples.
- c. They will actively invite couples to seek convalidation and ask for the assistance of married couples who have convalidated their civil unions.

2. Components for Civilly Married Couples Who Seek Marriage in the Church

- a. **Selection of Mentor Couples:** Couples seeking convalidation will recommend mentor couples, preferably who have experienced a similar process of discernment and decision, which will help build trust through shared experience.
- b. **Inventory:** They will complete a REFOCCUS or ENRICH inventory, depending on the parish’s or pastorate’s preferred inventory.
- c. **Natural Family Planning:** Couples will complete a Natural Family Planning course, as described in the policy for Formation for Couples before the Celebration of Matrimony. The pastor may grant an exception to a couple beyond child-bearing years. Couples will not have a requirement to chart.
- d. **Retreat:** Those couples who seek convalidation will receive invitations to participate in retreats with engaged couples but will not be required to participate.

¹⁰ *Familiaris Consortio*, 65.

¹¹ c.f. *Amoris Laetitia*, 295.



Ongoing Formation after the Celebration of Matrimony

Context

After the celebration of matrimony, clergy and lay ministers ought to show an active interest in couples and invite them to deeper participation in the mysteries that we celebrate. The first five years of marriage are especially challenging as couples learn how to live together and care for each other in this sacrament of service. Supporting couples during this time not only will help them participate in parish life but also address the concerns of Pope Francis:

“In this context, ‘couples are often uncertain, hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life. A crisis in a couple’s relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds.’ Marital problems are ‘often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another. Failures give rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life.’”¹²

Instruction

Parish leaders will provide accompaniment to all couples during the first five years of marriage.¹³

Foundational Resource: *Be Light* shall be the foundational resource. It is a companion tool to *Witness to Love* that provides mini-retreats and opportunities for faith sharing for couples during their first five years of marriage. *Be Light* operates similarly to *Witness to Love* in that both recruit volunteer leaders from those who participate in the experience.

- If a parish or pastorate has insufficient resources to provide this ministry, the Office of Pastoral Formation will connect clergy with the resources they need.
- If clergy or lay ministers prefer to use a resource different from *Be Light*, they will first seek input from the Office of Pastoral Formation.
- For parishes or pastorates that struggle to generate interest in this ministry among couples in their first five years of marriage, the Office of Pastoral Formation will help coordinate regional experiences among clusters of parishes.

While all couples ideally will receive the invitation to participate in ongoing formation after the celebration of marriage, the emphasis will be on those who celebrate this sacrament subsequent to the promulgation of these Instructions.

Additional Resources: The Office of Pastoral Formation will also continue to include on its section of the diocesan website resources for Marriage Encounter and Retrouvaille.

¹² *Amoris Laetitia* 41. In this paragraph, Pope Francis references, respectively, paragraph 10 of *Relatio Synodi* and his message to Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

¹³ You may find a sample of this five years of accompaniment in the appendix.



Forming Clergy and Mentor Couples

Ongoing Formation for clergy and lay leaders will ensure the success of these ministries at the parish level. For ministers who have not previously experienced *Witness to Love* and *Be Light*, they may participate in formation at the parish, pastorate, or diocesan level:

- The Diocese will coordinate one formation opportunity each year.
- Parishes or pastorates may choose to coordinate their own formation opportunities, and the Office of Pastoral Formation will promote these trainings throughout the Diocese as desired.

Just as the Diocese requests the contact information for directors of faith formation, so too will the Office of Pastoral Formation request this information for the directors of marriage accompaniment. This information will allow the Office of Pastoral Formation to communicate effectively about ongoing formation opportunities and other updates.

Among the ongoing formation that the Office of Pastoral Formation will make available to clergy, the following will have regular and heightened priority:

- Planning liturgical celebrations with couples, including how to plan and prepare Spanish-language and bi-lingual liturgies.
- Natural Family Planning learning opportunities for priests, deacons, and lay ministry leaders.



Liturgical Celebrations of Matrimony

As part of the formation process for couples, formation in liturgy is a high priority so that couples understand what they will celebrate in matrimony and retain it throughout married life.

Couples occasionally make requests to include in the Celebration of Matrimony practices that are not options within the rite but rather are derived from other sources. Examples include secular music, unity candles, and the blending of sand. The ritual states, “attention should be given to the appropriate use of options provided in the rite as well as to local customs, which may be observed if appropriate.”¹⁴

An appropriate local custom could be a practice from another culture (Native American, Latino, Filipino, Vietnamese, etc.) which expresses the mystery of marriage in Christ, or at least does not express anything contrary to the Gospel. The section, “[The Importance of Cultures of Origin](#),” offers further guidance and theological reflection on this topic.

Rather than providing the couple a list of practices that the Church permits and forbids, help the couple understand the liturgical celebration.

Instruction

1. **Foundational Resource:** To facilitate this conversation, parish leaders will use *Together for Life* or the Spanish-language equivalent, *Juntos para toda la vida*. If they prefer to use a different resource, they will first seek input from the Office of Pastoral Formation.
2. **Witnesses:** While there is a preference for the two official witnesses to the marriage to be Catholic, the witnesses need not be Catholic or even baptized. Witnesses, however, need to be at least eighteen years of age and be capable both of comprehending that a couple have exchanged consent and testifying to it.¹⁵
3. **Lectors:** In planning the liturgical celebration of matrimony, a couple should consider who could best proclaim the Word within the liturgical setting. In some instances, they might request a non-Catholic to perform this ministry. In such cases, the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* states, “The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or ecclesial Community to take on the task of reader.”¹⁶
4. **Weddings Outside of a Church:** If a couple requests a wedding outside of a church, please refer to the letter from Bishop Steven Biegler, “Weddings Outside of a Church,” dated January 15, 2019.

¹⁴ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 29.

¹⁵ Regarding the age of witnesses, see Wyoming Statutes §20-1-106 and Canon 1550 §1. Regarding whether witnesses must be baptized, see *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133



Celebrating Ministers and Marriage Preparation Teams

This section addresses common questions in relation to the use of *Witness to Love* and the ministry of mentor couples.

1. Will the role of clergy be greatly reduced due to the involvement of mentor couples?

Clergy might worry that they will have a limited involvement in the formation of couples for marriage once mentor couples begin their ministry. Quite the opposite is true, as mentor couples will serve under the direction of the clergy. Within the *Witness to Love* model clergy have significant opportunity to know couples who desire marriage. In fact, this relationship with clergy in a trusted setting forms one of the bedrocks of this ministry.

2. How will clergy ensure quality in Catholic formation when including mentor couples?

Clergy also ensure that mentor couples meet the expectations of the Diocese for this ministry. Rather than allow any couple to serve in this capacity, mentors need to fit within the image of the [“Profile for a Mentor Couple.”](#) These expectations will help assure alignment in the practice of this ministry between clergy and mentor couples while still allowing clergy and mentors to exercise the responsibilities proper to each.

For example, the “theology dinner” of *Witness to Love* allows clergy to communicate with the couples in a relaxed setting about topics that might cause discomfort in other settings, and it also allows mentor couples to continue this formation for the engaged couples in subsequent conversations. A concrete application of this approach arises in conversations about sexual ethics and Natural Family Planning. When a mentor couple is living with joy, it increases the effectiveness of communicating about these topics.

3. How will mentor couples be chosen and trained for this ministry?

Witness to Love advocates for the engaged couple to recommend to the pastor a couple whom they would like as their mentor couple. Since *Witness to Love* provides quality formation for such mentor couples, this option provides an excellent opportunity to deepen the connection to the Church for mentors.

Pastors may desire to have a cohort of mentors available in the event that an engaged couple cannot identify mentors on their own. In such cases, the Office of Pastoral Formation can provide support in building such a cohort.

4. What if a couple refuses to participate in formation prior to celebrating matrimony?

Couples might raise any number of concerns: the formation appears intimidating; they do not know anyone in the parish because they are new to the parish; their jobs require a great amount of their time or do often not allow them to be free at the same time; etc. Whatever the situation, begin by expressing your desire to assist them so that they might have a healthy and successful marriage. Ask them if they would be willing to speak with a mentor couple about the Church’s formation for marriage, so that they might ask questions and learn more. Similarly, you might ask the couple if you could invite a newly married couple to share their experience with them.



After the couple has had the opportunity to learn more, then ask them if they desire to participate. If they do not wish to participate, asking if their reason arises from circumstance or from lack of desire will help guide your pastoral outreach. If their reason for not wanting to participate does not arise from circumstance, then introduce a conversation about the importance of preparing for a lifelong commitment with the help of trusted individuals who live this vocation and that the Church supports healthy marriages through this kind of preparation.



Profiles

A profile presents a portrait of an individual, a couple, a parish or pastorate seeking to live as disciples. Effective use of these profiles occurs in an annual review of the pastorate's ministry as clergy and lay leaders examine whether the behaviors of the pastorate and the couples whom they form mirror the ideals that the profiles present.

Profile of a Couple after Initial Formation for Marriage

- Regularly participate in the liturgical life of the community.
- Developing a habit of prayer as a couple and as individuals.
- Able to articulate their dreams for their relationship.
- Able to articulate why marriage in the Church is necessary for their relationship.
- Dedicated to their intimacy and romance.
- Outward-facing and wanting to serve the community of faith and the world.
- Able to have conversations on topics of great importance.
- Know and respect areas of difference in their relationship.
- Able to disagree well.
- Desiring to seek support from mentors and others when needed.
- Understand and have received training in Natural Family Planning.

Profile of a Mentor Couple

In addition to the profile of a couple after initial formation for marriage, the description from *Witness to Love* of mentor couples – and adjoining questions to help engaged couples – follows.¹⁷

It is very important to coach the engaged couple properly so that they can choose the right mentor couple. Ask them to consider **prayerfully** their choice of a couple whom:

- They both admire.
- They both are comfortable with.
- Practices and is active in their Catholic Faith.
- Attends church regularly.
- Have been married in the church for five years or more.
- Are in good standing with the Church.
- They can look at and say, “I would be happy to have a marriage like that,” or “I love the way they talk to each other and to their kids.”
- Attends your parish or the parish where they will be attending church after the wedding.
- They do not have to know the couple well.
- Can hold an engaged couple accountable, inspire them, and challenge them.
- Is preferably not an immediate relative unless the couple that they both are most comfortable with and admire happens to be a relative.

¹⁷ Please refer to the “[Mentor Couples](#)” webpage from Witness to Love, que es [disponible en español](#) también.



Profile of a Parish or Pastorate that Promotes Catholic Marriage

- Accompanies the People of God through all seasons of life in a way that models the permanence that the Church seeks to teach.
- Culture of discernment, including the vocation of marriage.¹⁸
- Embrace the sacramentality and mission of married life.
- Ability to welcome couples in a spirit of mercy and hospitality.¹⁹
- Offers ongoing formation to couples for at least five years after the celebration of matrimony.
- Community of encouragement and mutual support.
- Commitment to live as one Body in Christ because of sacramental celebrations.
- Encourages people to nurture their relationship with God through intentional times of personal and family prayer each day.
- Forms intentional disciples who joyfully proclaim the Gospel to all they meet and who are co-responsible for the mission of Christ to the world.
- Openness, welcome, and generosity to those who are unmarried or in struggling marriages.²⁰
- Understanding of the importance of cultures of origin in the success and life of a Catholic marriage.
- Practices mercy, welcomes, and accompanies those unable to receive the sacraments.
- Invites everyone to receive God's mercy through the sacraments.
- Nurtures unity within families, across parishes, in the Diocese, and in the Universal Church.

¹⁸ Often, couples will “slide” into marriage rather than deciding to marry, as the [National Marriage Project](#) notes. Helping the faithful at all ages and stages understand the importance of vocational discernment is crucial. For youth, consideration of Canon 1072 also proves essential.

¹⁹ c.f. *Amoris Laetitia*, 311, quoted here in full given the importance of these words to these ministries: “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel. It is true, for example, that mercy does not exclude justice and truth, but first and foremost we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth. For this reason, we should always consider ‘inadequate any theological conception which in the end puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, his mercy.’” Pope Francis cites the International Theological Commission’s 2007 document, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized*.

²⁰ cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 85.



The Importance of Cultures of Origin

The sacramental celebration of matrimony communicates the grace by which couples live the vocation of marriage. In consideration of the fact that our local Church contains within it many cultural families. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* highlights the relationship between liturgy and culture,

“Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples’ way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.”²¹

Culture can serve as an avenue through which to evangelize and catechize, which in turn brings the culture closer to the mysteries of God that we celebrate. Celebrations of matrimony may incorporate cultural rituals into these sacramental celebrations, and inclusion of cultural sensitivities into formation for marriage proves necessary for these celebrations.

For example, many Latino couples will desire to include the use of a *lazo* and *arras* into their liturgy, and *compadres* play an important role in these rituals. As such, helping engaged couples select *compadres* who will accompany them throughout the lives of their marriages will prove very helpful, and inviting *compadres* to participate in formation with engaged couples would also serve as an appropriate invitation.

Couples may also request to incorporate elements of another religious tradition into the liturgical celebration. As *Nostra Aetate* states:

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life (John. 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), men find the fulness of their religious life

“The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”²²

This language will help celebrating ministers work with couples to determine the most appropriate way of incorporating non-Catholic practices into the Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

²¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37.

²² *Nostra Aetate*, 2.



Special Circumstances

- **Cohabitation:** As cited earlier in reference to withholding judgment of couples who present themselves for marriage in the Church, in the instance of cohabitation, ask the couple why they have chosen to live in this manner. In their answer, try to elicit what their values are and their explanations of their values. While some couples do not understand or know Church teachings, and others have chosen to cohabit despite knowledge of the Church's teachings, still others might have chosen this living arrangement because of social necessity, like finances or the termination of a lease. Use this moment as an opportunity to draw the couple closer to the Church and to learn about what forces shape their lives before offering direction and guidance or deciding whether their cohabitation poses a risk to their fidelity to the Church's teaching and their relationship.
- **Convalidation:** For guidance with couples who seek convalidation, please refer to the section, "[Formation for Civilly Married Couples Seeking Marriage in the Church.](#)"
- **Immigration Status:** Some ministers have witnessed the occasion of couples marrying to afford one of the spouses immigration status and the ability to remain in the country. To prevent a marriage not entered in freedom for this cause, the Church has the responsibility to ensure that individuals receive protection so that they can freely engage in the full course of discernment and formation before marriage.
 - The pastor should consider having a trusted, bi-lingual volunteer accompany anyone who struggles with the English language. Some individuals may desire a Catholic marriage without a civil marriage license, especially given concerns of detention and the common practice in many countries that do not allow Catholic priests to complete equivalent civil marriage licenses.
 - If someone desiring to marry in the Church fears detention or deportation, contact the Office of Pastoral Formation to seek the most appropriate guidance in safeguarding the individual.
- **Interfaith Marriages:** Help the couple understand how dedication to the Catholic faith does not preclude a life-giving marriage if both spouses-to-be are not Catholic. Use the occasion to hear what might concern a non-Catholic individual about his or her future spouse's Catholicism and respond with invitations to explore whether these concerns are valid. Asking the couple how they would plan to raise future children in the faith will help them explore their differences and offer opportunities to invite people to encounter the Catholic Church in a new way and hopefully welcome them into our beloved community.
- **Pregnancy:** Pregnancy ought not be a cause to marry, especially if evidence of abuse or neglect exists in a couple's relationship. First, ensure the mother and her child have access to all necessary resources to ensure their physical and material health. Next, help the couple identify how to parent together, and how this situation differs from the vocation of marriage in their circumstance. Helping them understand this difference may offer an avenue to introduce them to the vocation of marriage and begin the discernment in freedom, rather than "sliding" into marriage as a response to an unexpected pregnancy.²³

²³ Refer to note 17 regarding the findings of the National Marriage Project and the juxtaposition of "sliding" rather than "deciding."



- **Pre-nuptial Agreements:** The mention of a pre-nuptial agreement provides a prime opportunity for pastoral guidance. If one of the spouses-to-be insists on securing a pre-nuptial agreement, introduce a conversation about whether the couple needs assistance in addressing doubts, hesitations, or concerns about the permanence of the marital commitment.
- **Senior Couples and Benefits:** Senior Couples, especially those who receive a pension from an ex-spouse or whose benefits plans will change because of marriage, might have reticence to marry. Inviting these couples to an open conversation about concerns, fears, and priorities will help move the conversation in a direction that permits free discernment of the vocation of marriage.

A Note about Technology

Just as appropriate boundaries in relationships preserve the love and care to which the vocation of marriage calls couples, the same practice of boundaries online proves equally important. Helping couples build transparency with each other and boundaries with digital communication will support and sustain them in their formation for marriage. These boundaries include: not texting former partners or pursuing interaction with them on social media; deleting accounts for dating apps and services, if they used them previously; and not using phones, tablets, or computers for pornography or to explore romantic alternatives to one's spouse.²⁴

Causes for a Celebrating Minister to Delay or Not Permit a Marriage

- The existence of a *vetitum*, *monitum*, or a circumstance that requires the permission of the local ordinary.²⁵
- Both individuals have not reached eighteen years of age.²⁶
- Evidence of abuse (sexual, emotional, physical, etc.)
- Evidence of untreated addictions, including pornography addiction. These situations warrant pastoral care and possibly referral to other capable professionals to assist the couple in their discernment and marry in freedom.
- Insufficient maturity or need for counseling, especially regarding family of origin and communication difficulties.
- Evidence that the engaged couple does not intend to live what the Church intends by marriage, especially if any minister notices anything that obstructs a valid celebration of matrimony.²⁷

²⁴ For more information and data supporting this claim, visit the National Marriage Project and its [2019 State of Our Unions](#) report.

²⁵ c.f. Can. 1071.

²⁶ c.f. Can. 1072.

²⁷ Refer to the [webpage of the tribunal](#) to locate descriptions of such causes.



Appendix

The following resources provide samples and further explanation to items that the Instructions identify as essential practices.

Sample: Five-year plan for Ongoing Formation of Married Couples

Within the framework of *Be Light*, ordained and lay ministers may accompany couples for the first five years of marriage using the following method or one that is similar:

- The Office of Pastoral Formation will help couples have access to *Be Light* experiences if their parishes or pastorates do not have the resources to host these experiences.
- After the first two years of marriage, the couple may receive an invitation to participate in a Marriage Encounter Weekend, either from a member of the clergy or from another couple. Parish leaders may also recommend them to invite their compadres and the godparents of their children, if they have established these relationships. As parish leaders determine to be more appropriate, they may extend invitations to Retrouvaille.
- In the fifth year of marriage, couples will receive an invitation to complete a REFOCCUS or ENRICH inventory and explore the results with a mentor couple. In this fifth year, couples will also be invited, if the parish leaders believe they would be good candidates, to discern supporting the ministry of Marriage Accompaniment by serving as a mentor couple.

Resources for Those with an Unexpected Pregnancy

The [Wyoming Department of Health](#) provides explanations on how to help expecting mothers obtain the following resources:

- Medicaid, including for children
- Medicaid: Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women
- Kid Care CHIP
- [The Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\) Program](#)

The [Wyoming Department of Family Services \(DFS\)](#) also offers resources for:

- Food Assistance
- Home, Utility, and Energy
- Cash Assistance
- Child Care Assistance
- Child Support



Collection of Resources Identified within this Document

- **Ecclesial Documents**
 - [*Amoris Laetitia*](#)
 - [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#)
 - [*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*](#)
 - [*Familiaris Consortio*](#)
 - [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*](#)

- **Diocese of Cheyenne**
 - [Marriage Accompaniment](#) (within the [Office of Pastoral Formation](#))
 - [Office of the Tribunal](#)
 - [Vision 2030](#)

- **Liturgy Preparation**
 - [*The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*](#)
 - [*Together for Life*](#)
 - [*Juntos para toda la vida*](#)

- **Inventories**
 - [FOCCUS](#) and [REFOCCUS](#)
 - [PREPARE/ENRICH](#)

- **Witness to Love**
 - [About](#)
 - [Civil Marriage Initiative](#)
 - [Be Light: Marriage Enrichment Small Groups](#)
 - [Parish Roll-out Guide](#). Para obtener la guía en español, [usa este sitio de web.](#)
 - [Fertility Awareness Resources](#)
 - [Recursos en español](#)

- **Other Resources**
 - [For Your Marriage](#), a resource from the USCCB
 - [The National Marriage Project](#)



Contributors

The following contributed their time, prayer, and thinking during the development of these Instructions. Some participated in initial calls to identify the needs of the local Church, while others contributed their work through writing and reviewing drafts. Still others began early implementation of resources from *Witness to Love*. All have brought to bear their wisdom, discernment, and life in Christ.

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In the Lord,



Joseph Wotawa
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