

National Directory for Catechesis

Catechesis for the Sacrament of Matrimony

“Catechesis for the Sacrament of Matrimony is addressed to the whole parish community. It is addressed directly to couples intending to marry in the parish....Catechesis specifically for adults should be offered through all the stages of married life and should be the model for all other forms of catechesis on Christian marriage. Catechesis on Christian marriage and distinctively Christian family values should be given to adolescents and teenagers during their high school years. Children begin learning the meaning of married love at a very early age from their parents, both through the example of their lives and through their more formal instruction. The family is the most effective school for catechesis on Christian marriage and family life.”

“Diocese and parishes should present catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony that:

- Encourages the care and concern of the whole Christian community for married couples by public recognition of couples planning marriage, modeling by couples in successful marriages, and support of couples in challenged marriages
- Stresses marriage as a distinct and dignified vocation in the Church
- Explains the effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony: the establishment of a perpetual and exclusive bond between the spouses that is sealed by God himself, the perfection of the mutually exclusive and permanent love of the couple, the strengthening of their indissoluble unity, and the experience of a foretaste of the Kingdom of God
- Encourages marriage within the Catholic faith and explains why this is desirable (the Church requires marriage within the Catholic faith; permission or a dispensation from the bishop is necessary for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic or an unbaptized person, respectively)
- Teaches that marriage is a covenant of love in which God participates as an active member
- Acknowledges that it is in the love and struggles of marriage that a couple attains the holiness of their vocation
- Teaches that in Christian marriage the unity of the couple is a unity founded in an equal personal dignity and expressed in an unreserved mutuality of self-giving
- Teaches that the family is the first and essential center of faithful living, the domestic Church
- Teaches that the home is the first school of Christian life and human enrichment
- Teaches that a couple’s marriage in Christ is a sacred relationship that is supported for the length of their lives by the grace to love each other with the love Christ has for the Church
- Teaches that fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children are essential to Christian marriage
- Teaches that Christian marriage is for the mutual support of the spouses, their growth in love, and the procreation and education of their children
- Includes a clear presentation of the Church’s teaching on the morally acceptable methods of regulating birth and the immorality of artificial birth control, of sterilization for that purpose, and of abortion
- Emphasizes their personal responsibility to protect the human life that they co-create with God from the moment of conception to natural death

- Includes instruction on the rite of the sacrament
- Teaches that the couple themselves are the ministers of the sacrament and that their consent should be publicly exchanged in their vows before a priest or deacon (or a witness authorized by the Church) and two other witnesses, ideally in the presence of an assembly of the faithful
- Assists the couple in deepening their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman whereby the spouses establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life that is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children

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Dioceses and parishes should also present catechesis to the whole Catholic community that

- Encourages the care and concern of the whole Christian community for those who have suffered the trauma of divorce
- Encourages the Christian community to welcome divorced persons and their children into the parish as truly integral members
- Makes clear that, while the fact of divorce itself does not prevent reception of the sacraments, Catholics who are divorced and remarried without having obtained a declaration of nullity cannot participate in the sacramental life of the Church
- Explains that a Church annulment or “declaration of nullity” is an official decision by the Church that a marriage was invalid from the beginning, but that it does not affect the legitimacy of children resulting from the union
- Encourages those Catholics who are divorced and remarried outside the Church to seek to regularize their marriage if possible, “to listen to the word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace.” *

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