



**Office of the Tribunal  
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To Ministers of the Archdiocese,

As a resource to compliment the *Archdiocese of Anchorage Sacramental & Catechetical Guidelines (8/2008) on Marriage*, I have approved the following required procedures for all ministers who are preparing couples for marriage. As ministers we have a responsibility to prepare couples in the most pastoral, honorable and complete way. Couples have the right to receive the best premarital preparation available to them as they discern this valued and life long vocation of marriage.

These procedures are to be followed in every instance where a couple is preparing for marriage. Pastoral considerations are of the utmost importance, yet they are not to be used as a means of ignoring important rights owed to a couple. Please refer all questions to the Office of the Tribunal.

Blessings to you all in your ministry,

Sincerely yours in Christ and Mary;

†Roger L. Schwietz, OMI  
Archbishop of Anchorage  
September 9, 2016

# Archdiocese of Anchorage Marriage Preparation Procedures:

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### A. Pre-marital preparation checklist

It is advised that each pre-marital file include a checklist to ensure all requirements have been followed. In some instances, a missing canonical requirement could later determine a marriage as invalid due to a defect of form if either party petitions the tribunal for a declaration of nullity.

❖ *Addendums 1 and 2 are suggested check lists to be used or its contents included in a parish generated checklist.*

### B. Pre-marital questionnaires for bride and groom

When meeting with a couple, the first step is to complete a pre-marital questionnaire for each party. The questionnaire should be conducted as an interview and filled out by the preparing minister. Also the interview for the questionnaire needs to be completed separately and not with the parties sitting together.

The purpose of this document is to not only get pertinent identifying and sacramental information, but also to learn of previous marriages and the person's intention and sense of freedom in entering the marriage. If there are any previous marriages, including a civil marriage to be convalidated, please ensure those are listed in question 9 and explained in question 23 of the pre-nuptial questionnaire.

### C. **Necessary Documents:**

**Questionnaire** - The questionnaire must be completed, signed and included in the marriage file.

**Baptismal records** - Proof of baptism is required for all Catholics and is preferred for all non-Catholics.

- ❖ If a baptismal certificate is unable to be obtained due to a grave reason for a Catholic, such as lost church records or inability to retrieve record from a church in a developing country or diocese, a signed affidavit from a family member, someone who was present at the baptism or someone who has knowledge of the date and place of the baptism would suffice.
- ❖ Documentation or a signed affidavit is also acceptable if a non-Catholic's baptismal record is unable to be obtained.
- ❖ The baptismal record for all Catholics should be requested within six months of the scheduled wedding, by the Catholic party or when necessary, by the preparing minister. This record should be an original with the parish seal and include sacramental notations.

**Civil marriage license**—The civil marriage license must be obtained by the couple from the civil court house prior to the wedding. Immediately after the wedding celebration, the celebrating minister and witnesses must sign the license. It is the responsibility of the celebrating minister to send within 48 hours the signed license to the civil courts for recording, as civil law requires.

- ❖ For convalidations, a copy of their civil marriage certificate is needed and should be included in the pre-nuptial file.
- ❖ Declarations of nullity for prior marriages and/or death certificates for prior spouse(s) if applicable, should be included in the marriage file.

### D. **Convalidation/Radical Sanation**

A **Convalidation** is defined by Canon Law as a new consent of the will.

- ❖ A Convalidation is not simply a “blessing” of the previous consent by the church. A Convalidation, in the eyes of the church is, as if, the couple has never been married.
- ❖ Therefore, a Convalidation requires, and the couple has a right to, the same amount of premarital preparation as any other couple, regardless of how long the couple has been civilly married. It is imperative that the church provides preparation to assist the couple in strengthening their relationship by understanding the churches teaching of marriage.
- ❖ There are many different reasons for a couple to seek a convalidation, yet in some situations, a couple seeks a convalidation because one or both of the parties are hoping that a marriage celebrated and recognized by the church will heal any marital problems that have been festering over the years. Especially for this reason, preparation is important.

A **Radical Sanation** involves an invalid marriage and its convalidation without the public renewal of matrimonial consent. Consult the tribunal if there is a case where a radical sanation may seem to be the best pastoral approach for a couple.

## **E. Affidavits of Free Status**

Each party should have two affidavits of free status forms completed. These forms are normally requested by the parish minister and are from people who have known each party the longest and are more than just acquaintances. Family members or close friends can be used for people who have known them for over five to ten years depending on the age of the party.

- ❖ There is an option in the pre-marital questionnaire that allows for the preparing minister to dispense from requiring affidavits because they are morally certain the person is free to marry and have no impediments. It is not advisable to choose this option, unless a previous investigation was conducted, such as through a tribunal procedure..

## **F. Pre-Marital Instruments**

There are a number of instruments used by parishes to prepare, educate and assist the parties to determine their understanding, capability and readiness for marriage. A pre-marital instrument must be used for the parties as a step in preparation. It is their right to enter a process of education and discernment. Examples of instruments used within the Archdiocese of Anchorage are: Prepare and Enrich, FOCCUS, individual counseling and couple to couple programs. All instruments must be approved by the Archbishop.

## **G. Engaged Encounter**

Engaged Encounter is an additional tool to assist with communication between the couple as they continue to discern their compatibility and commitment to each other. This type of weekend is strongly encouraged, but recognized that it is not available to every couple, especially in rural areas.

## **H. Dispensations/Permissions**

Canon Law requires for validity and/or for a marriage to be considered licit, dispensations or permissions be granted prior to the wedding. These circumstances include:

- ❖ When a Catholic marries an unbaptized person
- ❖ When a Catholic marries a non-Catholic baptized person
- ❖ When a couple asks, and the preparing minister supports, the request for a marriage to be celebrated somewhere other than a Catholic church.
- ❖ When a couple asks, and the preparing minister supports, the request for a marriage to be witnessed by a non-Catholic minister
- ❖ When either party is marrying outside of their parish of domicile

When requesting a permission/dispensation from the tribunal, copies of the following documents need to accompany the request: both the bride and the groom questionnaire, copies of the original baptismal certificates and the acquired affidavits.

**I. Delegations**

If the celebrating minister of the wedding is not a priest of the parish in which the wedding is taking place, then the celebrating minister must receive delegation by the pastor, prior to the wedding day. The delegation form is included in the pre-nuptial questionnaire

- ❖ In addition, if a priest is from a Diocese outside of the State of Alaska and/or does not hold faculties from the Archdiocese of Anchorage, the vetting policy of the Archdiocese must be followed.

**J. Marriages held in a parish of the Archdiocese to which neither party belongs**

When both Catholic parties are marrying outside of their parish of domicile, permission from a pastor of either party is required.

- ❖ When a couple is prepared in one parish within the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the wedding will be celebrated in another parish of the Archdiocese of Anchorage, the completed pre-nuptial file should be delivered to the parish where the marriage will be celebrated by the parish minister who is preparing the couple. This file should not be given to the parties.

**K. Marriages held in a diocese other than Anchorage**

When a couple is prepared in a parish within the Archdiocese of Anchorage and the wedding will be celebrated in a parish in another Diocese, the complete pre-nuptial file must be sent to the Anchorage Tribunal. The file will then be reviewed and sent to the Diocese of the Parish in which the marriage will take place. That diocese will then send the file to the parish where the marriage will be celebrated.

- ❖ The file should not be given to the parties and should not be mailed directly to the celebrating parish of another diocese. All documents sent to the tribunal must be originals. Copies are to be held in the preparing parish until the marriage has been celebrated.

**L. Natural Family Planning**

Natural Family Planning classes are strongly encouraged for all couples preparing for a Catholic Marriage, yet it is recognized that this is not always an option for all couples.

**M. Sacramental requirements prior to marriage**

The Archdiocese of Anchorage Sacramental & Catechetical Guidelines (8/2008) state that Catholics are to receive confirmation prior to marriage, unless grave inconvenience prevents the reception of the sacrament (Canon 1065,2) .

**N. Marriage Pre-Nuptial Document Records**

Documents regarding marriages and marriage preparation are to be kept in what is known as the “marriage file” and is considered confidential. This “marriage file” or “envelope” is a permanent record kept in the parish files.

- ❖ Please note: digital copies do not replace the keeping of mandatory hard copy files.