

TO: All Priests and Deacons

RE: Clarifications and specifics about Diocesan Policy for the Use of Non-Catholic Facilities for Weddings and Associated Concerns.

Revised: May 29, 2018

The revised Policy for Marriages (promulgated 2/28/2002) states that "The dignity and sacred nature of marriage makes a Catholic church especially 'suitable' for the celebration of marriage." It goes on to say that "Marriages may not be celebrated in places other than a parish church or public oratory without permission of the Local Ordinary" (cf. Marriage Policy Part VI n. 6). This policy makes it evident that a Catholic church is the preferred site even for a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person. Within the memory of some persons is the time that a mixed marriage could *not* be celebrated in a Catholic church (cf. 1917 Code, canon 1109.3). The law of the Church and the climate of ecumenical and inter-religious relations have changed significantly since those days. The celebration of a mixed marriage can become an occasion of openness and healing, presenting our faith tradition in a more positive light. It is to the good that non-Catholics are made to feel welcomed by our Church and invited to participate in prayer and worship. The mere convenience of celebrating the wedding at the place of the reception or in another secular environment may serve only to deprive the wedding of the vivid sense of the sacred that the church building makes evident. Nonetheless, in some circumstances celebration of the wedding in a place other than the parish church may be suitable or even recommended.

#### **Celebration of Weddings in a public Catholic Chapel**

Weddings may be celebrated in a public Catholic chapel, with permission of the pastor of that territory (canon 1118.1). (Examples of such chapels are the student chapel at Gonzaga University; the chapel of Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, the chapel at Sacred Heart Medical Center; but not the former Fort Wright chapel at Mukogawa Institute).

#### **Celebrations of Weddings in a secular setting**

If celebrating the wedding in a Catholic church truly presents difficulties because of the feelings, customs or (mis)understanding of non-Catholics who will be present, the Diocesan Bishop must be consulted for permission to use a secular site or facility. The priest/deacon who is preparing the couple for marriage or who intends to assist at the wedding should seek this permission before marriage preparation or other formalities are completed. The Bishop will consult the territorial pastor of the proposed place of the wedding prior to granting permission. If the Bishop gives permission to use the secular setting, the territorial pastor will grant the priest/deacon the faculty to assist at the wedding. Unless reserved to the Local Ordinary, the territorial pastor also grants any permission/dispensation required for the licit and valid celebration of marriage. Priests or deacons requesting this permission are to take care that the marriage is recorded and the pre-nuptial file retained in the proper parish wherein the facility is located.

#### **Celebrations of Weddings in Non-Catholic Churches**

The usual occasion for celebrating marriage in a non-Catholic church is when a dispensation from the Catholic canonical form of marriage has been granted (canon 1127.2). A dispensation from canonical form is a different issue from permission to celebrate marriage outside a Catholic church. When the Local Ordinary grants this dispensation, no additional permission is needed concerning the place of celebration. The law requires only that there be "some public form of celebration for validity" (canon 1127.3). These marriages are not recorded in the parish of the territory, but "in the parish of the Catholic party whose pastor conducted the investigation about the free status" (canon 1121.3). **Priests and deacons should not request permission to assist at weddings in a non-Catholic church according to Catholic canonical form.** It is much preferred that the priest or deacon requests a dispensation from canonical form, and takes part in the ceremony in a subordinate role to the host minister, who celebrates the wedding according to the rites of his/her ecclesial community. An exception to this norm is the circumstance when the Catholic church is not able to accommodate the wedding because of its size, and the non-Catholic church makes its facility available for the occasion.