



Convalidation

Bringing YOUR Marriage
into THE Church

Marriage Preparation Process for Couples Seeking Convalidation Instructions for Pastoral Ministers

- The marriage preparation process for a couple who is married outside the Church is primarily an opportunity for evangelization – to meet them where they are in their relationship with Jesus Christ, to proclaim the Gospel (bring the good news into every human situation), and assist them toward discipleship as they prepare to return to the sacraments and become full and active participants in their parish community.
- Pastoral Ministers should observe the *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation for the Catholic Church in New Jersey* (PP&G) relating to couples seeking convalidation. According to the guidelines, convalidation is considered a *Special Circumstance* that requires additional pastoral care (see PP&G excerpt, p. 40, attached).
- Because each couple's situation is unique, the marriage preparation process should always be tailored to each couple's specific needs. However, once it has been determined that the couple is free to marry in the Church, certain general rules can be applied:
 - For couples who have been civilly married for more than two years, it is recommended that their instructional session(s) for marriage preparation (commonly referred to as "Pre-Cana") are conducted in the parish either by their pastoral minister or by a married mentor couple of the parish. The approved preparation process in the Diocese of Trenton for both the instructional and formational sessions is comprised of these steps:
 - The pastoral minister may choose to have the couple participate in the Re-FOCCUS marital inventory process (Note: The Re-FOCCUS inventory is available as a tool from FOCCUS Inc. USA for all pastoral ministers who are registered as FOCCUS Facilitators; information on how to use the Re-FOCCUS inventory for convalidating couples is



available from the Dept. of E&FL (Peg Hensler, 609-403-7156); information is also available on the FOCCUS website (www.foccusinc.com).

- Each couple should complete the *Take Home Exercise for Convalidating Couples* available from the Dept. of E&FL (also available on the diocesan Marriage Ministry Resource page – www.dioceseoftrenton.org/marriageresources), then discuss with pastoral minister.
- Couples will be instructed by their pastoral minister on the following topics (see suggested couple handouts available on diocesan marriage ministry resource page)
 - ✱ Marriage as Vocation
 - ✱ Marriage as Sacrament
 - ✱ Marriage as Covenant
 - ✱ Marriage and the Eucharist
 - ✱ Why Marry Catholic – the benefits of Catholic marriage
 - ✱ Strategies for successful Mixed or Interfaith marriage (if applicable)
 - ✱ Natural Family Planning (for couples in child-bearing years)
- Couples with prior marriages in their past should attend the diocesan *To Trust Again* remarriage workshop (www.dioceseoftrenton.org/precana).
- It is highly recommended that couples attend a Marriage Encounter weekend (www.aweekendforyourmarriage.org; information on weekends also available from the Dept. of E&FL).
- For couples married less than two years, their situation is similar to the majority of engaged couples who are already living together, therefore their instructional and formational sessions should be similar to the that of engaged couples entering first-time marriage; couples should:
 - Complete the FOCCUS pre-marital inventory process
 - Attend a diocesan-approved marriage preparation workshop (a parish or diocesan Pre-Cana program; Engaged Encounter weekend; or sessions with a mentor couple. Private preparation by the pastoral minister is also permitted if approved by the



pastor. Couples with a prior marriage should attend the diocesan *To Trust Again* remarriage workshop.

- For *all* convalidating couples:
 - Assist the couple in planning the most suitable type of ceremony. For two Catholics, a nuptial Mass is suggested so that the first meal shared by the couple is the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith.
 - Set up an appointment for the couple (or Catholic party) to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation after the wedding and encourage them to become actively involved in the parish community.
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Pastoral Policies & Guidelines, p. 40:

Convalidation Goal: To help a couple recognize the wise and prudent reasons for convalidating their marriage.

Guideline: When approached by a couple requesting the convalidation of their marriage, the pastoral minister should endeavor to balance affirmation of the couple's desire to regularize their marital status, with concern for the integrity of the new marriage to be celebrated.

Discussion:

- It is common to hear convalidation defined as having one's marriage "blessed by the Church," but this is a misunderstanding. The effect of a convalidation is to establish a canonical marriage where there was previously only a civil marriage.
- There are various reasons why a couple might seek the convalidation of their union. It is hoped that a request is born of the couple's or the Catholic party's desire to return to the active practice of the Faith. Their initiative may arise because an impediment to a valid marriage has now been removed. Currently, even many who consider themselves practicing Catholics are unfamiliar with the Church's teaching on marriage and they ask that their marriage be convalidated simply because they have only recently become aware of its irregular status.
- It is not uncommon for a convalidation to be sought for reasons that may jeopardize the valid celebration of the new marriage. For example, a husband or wife may seek a marriage in the church to remedy a troubled relationship. This is to be addressed adequately, lest the convalidated marriage result in separation.



- The pastoral minister should be especially careful to:
 - Inquire about the couple's motivation for wanting to regularize their marriage at the present time. The following are some questions touching on the validity of marriage which the pastoral minister should explore with the couple prior to scheduling the convalidation:
 - Is the couple making the request freely, or are they being pressured by parents or others to be married in the Church?
 - Do the parties consider their relationship to be a loving and fulfilling one, or is the couple experiencing serious problems which they believe can somehow be resolved through a religious ceremony?
 - Explain to the couple that for the validity of the marriage now coming into being, both parties must make a new act of consent (cc. 1156-1160). Canon 1157 requires that at the exchange of vows for convalidation there must be a new act of the will consenting to marriage. The renewing parties must be aware that their prior ceremony of marriage was invalid from the beginning. Thus the pastoral minister must make it clear to the parties that their new act of consent will bring marriage into being. It would be counterproductive to tone down the language by suggesting that convalidation is simply the blessing of a marriage.
 - Should the pastoral minister find the parties unable or unwilling to acknowledge the invalidity of their earlier marriage ceremony, the pastoral minister should bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate diocesan official. If it is clear that their naturally sufficient marriage consent perdures, the proper diocesan bishop could be asked to grant a radical sanation (c. 1161).
- In order to avoid endangering the Church's competence to also preside over marriages on behalf of the civil authority, the pastoral minister should inform the couple that New Jersey law requires a "Remarriage License" issued by the appropriate municipal official at the time of the convalidation.