

NATIONAL PASTORAL INITIATIVE ON MARRIAGE

Committee on Marriage and Family Life U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Mission:

The Initiative is a multi-year, broadly based collaborative effort to promote, preserve, and protect marriage, understood as both a sacramental reality and a human institution.

- It will make a pastoral letter its centerpiece, emphasizing the bishops' teaching and pastoring responsibilities.
- It will respond to contemporary concerns about marriage on the basis of authentic Catholic doctrine and sound pastoral practice.
- It will draw from the experience and expertise of many, including engaged and married couples, pastors, social scientists, theologians, educators, communications experts, and others.
- It will address primarily the Catholic community, but will also offer a positive message and evangelizing witness to society.
- It will directly produce and also encourage others to produce resources that help local pastoral ministers to do more effective teaching and pastoral care.
- It will seek collaboration within the Bishops Conference and cooperative relationships with other groups that share similar values and concerns for the vitality of marriage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[Origins of the Initiative](#)

[Select stats on marriage and family life](#)

[Q & A on marriage](#)

[Survey of diocesan marriage programs](#)

[Stories of marriage ministries](#)

Goals:

In the Catholic community:

- Demonstrate pastoral concern for strengthening marriage at all its stages and in its many circumstances, particularly through listening to the experience of the Christian faithful;
- Offer authoritative teaching and pastoral guidance about marriage as a sacrament, a vocation, and a human institution;
- Connect authentic Catholic belief and teaching with the major issues present in marriage today;
- Promote more extensive and effective ministries to marriage, particularly in parishes.

In Society:

- Offer a specific Catholic witness to the meaning, value, and sanctity of marriage;
- Join our efforts with those of others who are working in various social sectors to promote, preserve, and protect marriage;
- Encourage laws, public policies, and other social strategies that will strengthen marriage in light of its contribution to the common good and its benefit to individuals, families, and communities.

TIMELINE:

PHASE ONE: Development and Consultation (2005 -- 2007)

This phase includes research and consultative activities designed for two purposes: (a) to propose what topics and issues are most important to include in a pastoral letter, what audiences should be addressed, and what are ways of communicating the message faithfully and creatively; (b) to produce information and ideas that, even if they cannot be incorporated fully into a pastoral letter, can be shared with various audiences, e.g., diocesan and parish staffs, as resources for them to use in promoting and sustaining marriage and enhancing their pastoral ministries.

PHASE TWO: Preparation of Pastoral Letter (2007 -- 2008)

This phase includes processes for selecting themes, integrating data gathered in the consultative phase, creating an outline, writing drafts and getting feedback on them. The activities are sequenced according to the usual USCCB protocol for bringing a document to the vote of the full body of bishops. The phase concludes with the publication and initial dissemination of the pastoral letter.

PHASE THREE: Implementation of Pastoral Letter and Continuing Work (2008 --)

This phase is directed toward the further development and application of the themes and messages contained in the pastoral letter. A broad range of implementation projects will be encouraged. Existing mechanisms can be employed for the follow-up and implementation activities and new ones might need to be created for this purpose.

Phase One: DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTATION (2005 – 2007)

[Summary Report of 2005 Activity](#)

Diocesan Bishops Pastoral Letters on Marriage
From 1980 through 2005, many U.S. bishops addressed different aspects of marriage through pastoral letters, articles, and speeches. For the most part the bishops either wrote about concerns closely related to the Sacrament of Matrimony (annulments, cohabitation, contraception, marriage preparation, sexuality), or they discussed marriage in the larger context of family life. We have composed a <u>summary of the pastoral letters</u> .

Dialogue of Social Scientists & Theologians
In October 2005 the Committee sponsored a colloquium at Creighton University entitled "Promoting and Sustaining Marriage as a Community of Life and Love." The colloquium brought together three theologians and three social scientist to explore, by means of prepared papers and subsequent discussion, the point of convergence and mutual reinforcement that both disciplines bring to the topic of marriage. The discussion was a collaborative search for ways that Catholic teaching and ministry can connect with the questions, needs, and aspirations of those contemplating marriage and those living it. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <u>Introductory remarks of Bishop Boland</u>

Diocesan Marriage Preparation Policies

Virtually all U.S. dioceses require some form of marriage preparation prior to the wedding. Over the past several decades policies, practices, and procedures for doing marriage preparation have been developed and refined. Today the Catholic Church in the U.S. is an acknowledged pioneer and leader in this form of marriage education. We have surveyed the policies of 119 dioceses and written an [analysis of marriage preparation policies](#) that identifies common practices, significant differences, and current trends that are evolving, such as cultural adaptations, liturgical rituals, and an emphasis on the life cycle of marriage.

Diocesan Focus Groups

Between June and December 2005 more than 80 U.S. dioceses conducted focus groups with newly married, middle years, and older couples; Spanish-speaking couples; remarried couples; interfaith and interchurch couples; separated and divorced person; and single young adults. Participants identified their major issues and concerns around marriage; discussed their experience of marriage ministry in their diocese and parishes; and offered suggestions to improve church outreach to engaged and married couples. A summary of the focus group reports will be available in 2006.

- [News release announcing the focus groups](#)