



## White Paper Containing Excerpts from Various Documents on the **Sacrament of Marriage**, **Family** and ***Proximate Preparation*** for Marriage

---

### On Proximate Preparation

#### **FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO – SAINT JOHN PAUL II, 1981**

66. Remote preparation begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves as being endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weaknesses. It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in interpersonal and in social relationships, with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex, and so on. Also necessary, especially for Christians, is solid spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission, without excluding the possibility of the total gift of self to God in the vocation to the priestly or religious life.

**Upon this basis there will subsequently and gradually be built up the proximate preparation,** which-from the suitable age and with adequate catechesis, as in a catechumenal process-involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, as it were, a rediscovery of them. This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions. The religious formation of young people should be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with a preparation for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life, such as stable work, sufficient financial resources, sensible administration, notions of housekeeping.

Finally, one must not overlook preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family.



### **EXCERPTS FROM: PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**

#### **Pontifical Council for the Family - May 13, 1996**

**33. The period of proximate preparation** generally coincides with the period of youth. (see #35 below which broadens the definition)

Therefore it includes everything that pertains to the pastoral care of youth as such which is concerned with the integral growth of the faithful. The pastoral care of youth cannot be separated from the framework of the family as if young people make up a kind of separate and independent "social class". It should reinforce the young people's social sense, first with regard to the members of their own family, and orient their values toward the future family they will have. The young people should have already been helped to discern their vocation through their own personal efforts and with the aid of the community, and above all the pastors. This discernment must take place before any commitment is made to get engaged. When the vocation to marriage is clear, it will be sustained first by grace and then by adequate preparation. The pastoral care of youth should also keep in mind that, because of various kinds of difficulties — such as a "prolonged adolescence" and remaining longer in one's family (a relatively new and troubling phenomenon), young people today tend to put off the commitment to get married for too long.

34. Proximate preparation should be based first of all on a catechesis sustained by listening to the Word of God, interpreted with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, in view of an ever greater understanding of the faith and giving witness to it in concrete life. Instruction should be offered in the context of a community of faith between families, especially in the parish, who participate and work in the formation of young people, according to their charismas and roles, and expand their influence to other social groups.

35. The engaged should receive instruction regarding the natural requirements of the interpersonal relationship between a man and a woman in God's plan for marriage and the family: awareness regarding freedom of consent as the foundation of their union, the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the correct concept of responsible parenthood, the human aspects of conjugal sexuality, the conjugal act with its requirements and ends, and the proper education of children. All of this is aimed at knowing the moral truth and forming the personal conscience.

Proximate preparation should certainly ascertain whether the engaged have the basic elements of a psychological, pedagogical, legal and medical nature for marriage and family life. However, especially with regard to total self-giving and responsible procreation, the theological and moral formation will have to be given in a particular way. In fact, conjugal love is total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 9).

Today the scientific bases of the natural methods for the regulation of fertility are recognized. Knowledge about these methods is useful. When there is just cause, their use must not only be a mere behavioral technique but be inserted into the pedagogy and process of the growth of love (cf. *EV* 97). Then the virtue of chastity will lead the spouses to practice periodic continence (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2366-2371).



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

This preparation should also ensure that Christian engaged persons have correct ideas and a sincere "sentire cum ecclesia"(to think with the church) regarding marriage itself, the mutual roles of a woman and a man in a couple, the family and society, sexuality and openness towards others.

36. Young people should also be helped to become aware of any psychological and/or emotional shortcomings they may have, especially the inability to open up to others, and any forms of selfishness that can take away from the total commitment of their self-giving. This help will also aid in discovering the potential and the need for human and Christian growth in their life. For this purpose, the persons in charge of marriage preparation should also be concerned with giving solid formation to the moral conscience of the engaged so that they will be prepared for the free and definitive choice of marriage which is expressed in the mutually exchanged consent before the Church in the marriage covenant.

37. During this stage of preparation, frequent meetings will be necessary in an atmosphere of dialogue, friendship and prayer, with the participation of pastors and catechists. They should stress the fact that "The family *celebrates the Gospel of life* through *daily prayer*, both individual prayer and family prayer. The family prays in order to glorify and give thanks to God for the gift of life, and implores his light and strength in order to face times of difficulty and suffering without losing hope" (EV 93). Moreover, Christian married couples who are apostolically committed, in a vision of sound Christian optimism, can contribute to shedding greater light on Christian life in the context of the vocation to marriage and in the complementarity of all the vocations. Therefore, this period should not only be for theoretical study but also for formation during which the engaged, with the help of grace and by avoiding all forms of sin, will prepare to give themselves as a couple to Christ who sustains, purifies and ennobles the engagement and married life. In this way, premarital chastity takes on its full meaning and rules out any cohabitation, premarital relations, and other practices, such as *mariage coutumier* (*arranged marriages??*), in the process of making love grow.

38. In line with the sound pedagogical principles of a gradual and comprehensive personal growth, proximate preparation must not neglect formation for the social and ecclesial tasks proper to those who will have new families as a result of their marriage. Family intimacy should not be conceived as being closed in on itself, but rather as a capacity to interiorize the human and Christian riches inherent in married life in view of an ever greater giving to others. Therefore, in an open concept of the family, married and family life requires the spouses to recognize themselves as subjects having rights but also duties towards society and the Church. In this regard, it will be very useful to encourage reading and reflecting on the following documents of the Church which are a rich and encouraging source of human and Christian wisdom: *Familiaris Consortio*, the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and others.

39. The proximate preparation of young people should make them understand that the commitment they take on through the exchange of their consent "before the Church" makes it necessary for them to begin a path of reciprocal fidelity in the engagement period. If necessary,



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

any practices to the contrary must be abandoned. This human commitment will be enhanced by the specific gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to the engaged who invoke him.

40. Since Christian love is purified, perfected and elevated by Christ's love for the Church (cf. GS 49), the engaged should imitate this model and develop their awareness of self-giving which is always connected with the mutual respect and self-denial that help this love grow. Reciprocal self-giving thus implies more and more the exchange of spiritual gifts and moral support in order to make love and responsibility increase. "The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that gift: *the gift of one person to another person*. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the *spousal nature of love*" (*Gratissimam Sane*, 11).

41. Spousal spirituality, by involving human experience which is never separated from moral life, has its roots in Baptism and Confirmation. Preparation of the engaged should therefore include regaining the dynamism of the sacraments, with a special role of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The sacrament of Reconciliation glorifies divine mercy toward human misery and makes the vitality of Baptism and the dynamism of Confirmation grow. From this the pedagogy of redeemed love is strengthened which lets the greatness of God's mercy be discovered before the drama of man, created by God and wonderfully redeemed. By celebrating the memory of Christ's giving to the Church, the Eucharist develops the affective love proper to marriage in daily giving to one's spouse and children, without forgetting and overlooking that "the celebration which gives meaning to every other form of prayer and worship is found in *the family's actual daily life together*, if it is a life of love and self-giving" (*EV* 93).

42. For this kind of multifaceted and harmonious preparation, the persons who will be in charge will have to be identified and given adequate formation. It would be useful to create a group, on different levels, of pastoral workers who are aware of being sent by the Church. This group should be composed of Christian married couples in particular, and include experts possibly in medicine, law, psychology, with a priest who will prepare them for the roles they will play.

43. The pastoral workers and persons in charge must have a solid doctrinal preparation and unquestionable fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church so that they will be able to transmit the truths of the faith and the responsibilities connected with marriage with sufficient in-depth knowledge and life witness. It is quite obvious that these pastoral workers, as educators, will also have to be capable of welcoming the engaged, whatever their social and culture extraction, intellectual formation and concrete capacities may be. Moreover, their faithful life witness and joyful giving are indispensable conditions for carrying out their task. Based on their own experiences in life and human problems, they can offer some starting points for enlightening the engaged with Christian wisdom.

44. The above implies the need for an adequate formation program for the pastoral workers. The formation leaders' preparation should prepare them to present the fundamental guidelines of marriage preparation which we have spoken about with clear adherence to the Church's Magisterium, a suitable methodology and pastoral sensitivity, and also enable them to offer



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

their specific contribution, according to their own expertise, to the *immediate preparation* (nos. 50-59). The pastoral workers ought to receive their formation in special Pastoral Institutes and be carefully chosen by the Bishop.

45. The final result of this period of proximate preparation should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: unity, fidelity, indissolubility, fruitfulness; the conscience of faith regarding the priority of the sacramental Grace which associates the spouses, as subjects and ministers of the sacrament, to the love of Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church; the willingness to carry out the mission proper to families in the educational, social and ecclesial areas.

46. As *Familiaris Consortio* notes, the formative journey of young engaged persons should therefore include: deepening of personal faith and the rediscovery of the value of the sacraments and the experience of prayer. Specific preparation for life as a couple "will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman that has to be continually developed, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life" (FC 66); "preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the human and Christian benefit of the family" (*Ibid.*).

Moreover, the engaged should be helped beforehand to learn how to preserve and cultivate married love later, interpersonal, marital communication, the virtues and difficulties of conjugal life, and how to overcome the inevitable conjugal "crises".

47. However, the center of this preparation must be a reflection in the faith on the sacrament of Marriage through the Word of God and the guidance of the Magisterium. The engaged should be made aware that to become "una caro" (*Matthew* 19:6) in Christ, through the Spirit in Christian marriage, means imprinting a new form of baptismal life on their existence. Through the sacrament, their love will become a concrete expression of Christ's love for his Church (cf. *LG* 11). In the light of the sacramentality, the married acts themselves, responsible procreation, educational activity, the communion of life, and the apostolic and missionary spirit connected with the life of Christian spouses are to be considered valid moments of Christian experience. Although still not in a sacramental way, Christ sustains and accompanies the journey of grace and growth of the engaged toward the participation in his mystery of union with the Church.

48. With regard to a possible Directory that will bring together the best experiences with marriage preparation, it seems useful to recall what the Holy Father John Paul II stated in his concluding Discourse to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family held from September 30-October 5, 1991: "It is essential that the time and care necessary should be devoted to *doctrinal* preparation. The security of the content must be the centre and essential



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

goal of the courses in a perspective which makes spouses more aware of the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage and everything that flows from it regarding the responsibility of the family. Questions concerning the unity and indissolubility of marriage, and all that regards the meaning of the union and of procreation in married life and its specific act, must be treated faithfully and accurately, according to the clear teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. nn. 11-12). This is equally true for everything that pertains to the gift of life which parents must accept responsibly and joyfully as the Lord's collaborators.

The courses should not only emphasize what concerns the mature and vigilant freedom of those who want to contract marriage, but also their own mission as parents, the first educators of their children and their first evangelizers".

With deep satisfaction, this Pontifical Council observes that the tendency is growing towards greater commitment and awareness of the importance and dignity of the engagement period. Similarly, it urges that the specific courses will not be so brief as to reduce them to a mere formality. On the contrary, they should provide sufficient time for a good, clear presentation of the fundamental subjects indicated earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The course can be carried out in the individual parishes, if there are enough engaged persons and well-prepared collaborators, in the Episcopal or forane Vicariats (deaneries), or in parish coordinating structures. Sometimes they can be given by persons in charge of family movements, associations or apostolic groups guided by a competent priest. This is an area which should be coordinated by a *diocesan organism* that works on behalf of the Bishop. Without neglecting the various aspects of psychology, medicine and other human sciences, the content should be *centered* on the *natural and Christian doctrine of marriage*.

49. In proximate preparation, especially today, the engaged must be given formation and strengthened in the values concerning the defense of human life. Particularly in view of the fact that they will become the domestic church and "Sanctuary of life" (EV 92-92), they will become part in a new way of the "people of life and for life" (EV 6, 101). The contraceptive mentality which is prevalent today in so many places, and the widespread, permissive laws with all they imply in terms of contempt for life from the moment of conception to death, constitute a series of multiple attacks to which the family is exposed and wounded in the most intimate part of its mission, and which impede its development according to the requirements of authentic human growth (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 39, St. John Paul II on the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Rerum Ovarum*, Pope Pius XIII, 1891). Therefore, today more than before, formation is needed of the minds and hearts of the members of new families not to conform to the prevailing mentality. In this way, through their own new family life, one day they will be able to contribute towards creating and developing the culture of life by respecting and welcoming new lives in their love, as the testimony and expression of the proclamation, celebration and service to every life (cf. EV 83-84, 86, 93).





### PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE II: PROXIMATE PREPARATION - **One**

Posted: September 28, 2010

By: William E. May, *The Ethics of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), (c) 2010 Culture of Life.

#### **Responsible parenthood...**

Posted: October 05, 2010

Foundation. Reproduction granted

Earlier I offered suggestions about the “remote” preparation for marriage that begins during infancy—even in the womb—and lasts until the onset of puberty or early adolescence. The next two articles will present ideas about the “proximate” preparation for marriage: this one identifies what the term “proximate preparation” means and focuses on some of the major elements that ought to make up this proximate preparation. A second will continue the consideration of major elements in this preparation. A third will consider the matter of a chaste courtship (Ed This has been included in **Immediate** preparation as to previously cited reasons of “prolonged adolescence.”)

#### ***Essential elements in this proximate preparation***

We can identify these by considering carefully the thought of St. John Paul II and the Pontifical Council for the Family on this matter.

According to St. John Paul II this proximate preparation “will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship of a man and a woman, and it will encourage those concerned to study the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, with the essential medical and biological knowledge connected with it. It will also acquaint those concerned with correct methods for the education of children, and will assist them in gaining the basic requisites for well-ordered family life, such as stable work, sufficient financial resources, sensible administration, notions of housekeeping. Finally, one must not overlook preparation for...fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families, for active membership in groups, associations, movements and undertakings set up for the...benefit of the family” (*Familiaris Consortio* 66)....

In addition, it requires those preparing youth for marriage to help them understand the “facts of life,” and to do so not as mere biological knowledge but as enabling them to grasp more clearly God’s plan for marriage as a life-giving reality and to do so in a manner appropriate to their maturity, e.g., as pubescent teens, young adolescents, young adults etc. It should likewise be concerned with the proper education of children who will one day marry and raise a family and with practical aspects of married life such as a stable job, adequate financial resources etc. and also prepare them to be open to and collaborate with other families and the broader society of which they are members.



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

This document's list of items essential for the proximate preparation for marriage parallels that of St. John Paul II. But it explicitly notes the role of free consent in establishing marriage, speaks of marriage's unity (monogamous marriage) and indissolubility. The other items identified seem to me to be either identical with or very closely related to the ones already brought to our attention by St. John Paul II.

In light of this I propose the following as essential elements in the proximate preparation for marriage:

1. The key role of free personal consent by both man and woman to marry;
2. Marriage as monogamous and indissoluble;
3. Responsible parenthood;
4. The nature and meaning of the conjugal act;
5. The proper education of children;
6. Rights and duties of the married to the larger society....

### ***1. The Key Role of Free Personal Consent to Marry***

Consent is an act of the will, and the free, personal consent of one man and one woman to marry each other is absolutely necessary. This consent brings marriage into existence. It is what makes them *to be husbands and wives*.

We must distinguish this consent from the consent necessary to make a man and a woman *an engaged couple*. In getting engaged a man proposes marriage to a woman and if she says "yes" to this proposal, they consent to be an engaged couple. Their pledge to get married *in the future* is sealed when the man gives the woman an engagement ring. But engaged couples *are not* married; they are not husband and wife, nor do they have the rights and duties of husbands and wives. Each is free to break the engagement and continue searching for a wife or husband or perhaps to choose a single life as a priest or religious or as a single person in the world.

Helmut Thielicke hit the nail on the head when he said: "Not uniqueness establishes the marriage, but the marriage establishes the uniqueness." [1] This shows that at the heart of the act establishing marriage is a free, self-determining choice on the part of the man and the woman, through which they give themselves a new and lasting identity. This man becomes this woman's *husband*, and she becomes his *wife*, and together they become *spouses*. Prior to this act of irrevocable personal consent the man and the woman were separate individuals, replaceable and substitutable. But in and through this act they make each other unique and irreplaceable. The man and the woman are not, for each other, *replaceable and substitutable individuals* but are *irreplaceable and non-substitutable persons*.

### ***2. Marriage as Monogamous (the unity of marriage) and Indissoluble***

That marriage is monogamous and indissoluble follows from the nature of the consent to marry





## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

already considered. In and through this consent husbands “foreswear all other women” and wives “foreswear all other men,” and thus the reality to which they consent and bring into being is monogamous, i.e., between *one man* and *one woman*. The indissolubility of marriage is also rooted in the nature of this consent through which the man has given himself the *identity* of *this woman’s husband* and she has given herself the *identity* of *this man’s wife*.

My identity as Patricia Keck May’s *husband* is thus rooted in my very *being*, just as my identity as the *son* of Katherine Armstrong May and Robert W. May is rooted in my very *being*. Thus I can no more *un-spouse myself* through subsequent choices, just as I cannot *un-son* myself, nor can my wife *un-spouse herself*, just as she cannot *un-daughter* herself. I may be a *poor or bad* husband, just as I can be a *bad, unloving* son, but I remain for all that a *husband*, and the husband of the woman to whom I freely gave myself when I gave myself to her in marriage and she to me.

### **3. Responsible parenthood**

It is most important to explain what responsible parenthood requires in the proximate preparation for marriage. Today, unfortunately, many erroneously think that responsible parenthood means preventing the birth of a child who is, for some reason, unwanted by using contraception and, should contraception fail, using abortion as a backup. This is *irresponsible* parenthood.

Responsible parenthood means realizing, first of all, that children are a blessing, the gift crowning the marital act, not a curse or a burden. It means, secondly, that marriage and the having and raising of children go together; it is natural and normal for married couples to beget children to whom they can give the home they need and to which they have a right, and to educate them in love so that they love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.

Responsible parenthood also means understanding the “facts” of life. Those being given proximate preparation for marriage should realize that when a man and a woman have genital sex they are choosing to engage in the only kind of (natural) bodily act through which new human life can be generated. It remains this kind of act in itself even if some conditions, for instance, the infertility, temporary or permanent, of both the man and the woman may make it impossible for new life to be generated.

There can be serious reasons why a married couple ought not to have another baby: a new pregnancy might cause serious health problems for the wife; the time needed to care for a child already born suffering from maladies such as cystic fibrosis could make caring properly for another child during that child’s infancy very difficult; extreme financial burdens might be caused, etc.

Couples who contracept also may have a serious reason not to cause a pregnancy. Like all of us,



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

they are intelligent and purposeful in their actions. They know that if they have genital sex it can cause the woman to become pregnant. But they want to have genital sex and realize that it is the kind of bodily act through which a new life can be generated and thus cause the woman to be pregnant. They therefore do something precisely to impede that new life from beginning; that is, they contracept. Contracepting would be foolish and serve no purpose if they were kissing or having anal or oral sex or playing cards, but it does make sense and is purposeful if they want to have sexual intercourse and prevent the woman from getting pregnant.

Couples who practice responsible parenthood do not contracept. They realize that the wife may become pregnant if they engage in the marital act at a time when she is fertile. And they also know, as a result of excellent programs of natural family planning (or what can accurately be called “fertility awareness” programs), how to determine the times when the wife is fertile. If it then is reasonable not to cause her to become pregnant, they choose to abstain from the marital act and choose to engage in it when it is reasonable to think that she is not fertile. In addition, they can use this knowledge to enhance the likelihood of conception with pregnancy and birth of a new human person when it is prudent for them to have a child. Their behavior is completely different from that of couples who contracept....

#### ***4. Meaning and nature of the conjugal or marital act***

The conjugal or marital act is *not* merely a genital act between a man and a woman who *happen* to be married. It is an act “proper and exclusive” to spouses and as such it is the kind of act in and through which conjugal or marital love can be fittingly expressed. It is also the kind of bodily act in and through which new human life can be given and received. It is thus an act “open” to the good, first, of marital love, and, second, of new human life. If either spouse deliberately, i.e., intentionally, sets aside the good of conjugal love and chooses simply to gratify his or her lustful desires, the act can no longer be considered a marital or conjugal act—it is an act that abuses the other spouse. For instance, if a husband wanted sex and did not even care whether the person who gives him sexual pleasure is his wife or not, he violates the good of conjugal love and abuses his wife.

Just as a husband and a wife violate their marriage and render their genital union non-conjugal or non-marital by deliberately setting aside conjugal love and for it substitute their own selfish gratification, so they likewise violate their marriage and render their union non-conjugal if, in freely choosing to have genital sex, they deliberately repudiate its procreative meaning by intentionally “closing” their act to the transmission of new human life by contracepting....

#### ***5. The proper education of children***

Spouses are the primary educators of their children, not the state, and this truth ought to be recognized. They are not only to welcome their children lovingly and nurture them humanely, but to educate them in the love and service of God and neighbor. As their children’s primary educators they are the ones who have the right and responsibility to teach them “the facts of



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

life” when they are in puberty and beginning to realize that males and females are indeed different in many ways, they are sexual beings with sexual desires. Parents have the duty to help their adolescent children understand, as fittingly as possible given their level of maturity (beginning adolescence, teen age, etc.) not only the anatomical and biological “facts of life.” More importantly they must help their children learn that they must gain control of their feelings and desires and not allow themselves to become possessed by them and that they can do this only by fostering the virtue of chastity.

Chastity is an integral part of the virtue of temperance, which in turn is one of the four *cardinal* (from the Latin *cardo*, meaning “hinge”) virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

Temperance is a virtue concerned with ordering a person’s appetites for food, drink, and sex, and chastity is the specific virtue with regard to sex. Its function is to make it easy, second nature as it were, to order (ones) sexual desires reasonably so that (one) can relate properly to others, in particular persons of the opposite sex to whom he (or she) is naturally attracted. A person acquires this virtue by making true judgments and choices about what (they) rightly ought to do in (their) relationships toward others, again particularly persons of the other sex. Such judgments include judgments that (one) ought not have sex (genital sex) with another person or engage in sexually arousing behavior strongly inclining one to have sex unless he (or she) is married to that person. The virtue, acquired in this way, internally disposes a person to make choices in accord with these true judgments. It is, as it were, “seated” in the person’s sexual appetites so that (they) not only know intellectually what ought to be done or not done but “feels” repugnance at acting unchastely and joy in acting chastely. I think we could say that chastity therefore is a virtue that enables us to take possession of our sexual desires and not be possessed by them so that we think and feel that we must gratify them as much as possible. Only people so in possession of themselves are able to *give* themselves to others in love and with respect for their irreplaceable dignity as persons. Chaste adolescents, teens, and young adults will know and “feel” why it is good for them to abstain from genital sex or arousal behaviors that push one to engaging in sexual intimacies and intercourse. They will understand why it is good for them to be virgins until they are married.

As their children’s primary educators, parents likewise need to discipline their children fittingly. It is very important to know who their friends are and to explain to their children why some friendships should be dropped and others cultivated. Parents must also let their children know that as long as they are dependent on them, parents do not violate their privacy when they inspect their rooms. They are obliged to do so to make sure that, because perhaps of peer pressures, their children are not using drugs, alcohol, and purveying pornographic material. They need also to monitor their use of (screens) such as TV and the internet and make use of available technologies for blocking access to morally vicious internet sources...



### **6. Rights and duties to the larger society**

As part of educating their children, parents have the duty to show them during the proximate period of marriage preparation that good families are not closed in on themselves. They are part of a larger society, beginning with their neighborhood, their city or town, their state, their nation, and now the global community. They are called to work for the common good of these larger societies to the extent that is possible and to oppose movements that violate that good.

Briefly put, the “common good” of a society embraces all those real (as opposed to false) goods that contribute to the flourishing of individuals and the societies of which they are members, goods such as life itself, including health and bodily integrity, knowledge of the truth and appreciation of beauty, developing and exercising skills in play and work, living in friendship with others, coming into possession of their desires and not being possessed by them, etc.

### **Conclusion**

The matters considered here are absolutely essential for a decent program of proximate preparation for marriage aimed at adolescents, teen agers, and young adults. They must not only come to know the truths presented but must commit themselves to shape their own lives in accordance with them if their marriage is to be an authentic love-giving, life-giving union of a man and a woman that endures--for better or worse, in sickness and in health, until death—and not a pseudo-reality in which the man and the woman commit themselves not to love each other exclusively until death but only so long as their union is to their advantage...

---

### Notes

[1] Helmut Thielike, *The Ethics of Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 20.

(c) 2010 Culture of Life Foundation. Reproduction granted with attribution required.

... (**edited from** PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE II: PROXIMATE PREPARATION - **Responsible parenthood...**, Posted: October 05, 2010)

(Ed. with the current delay in marriages the time frame seems more consistent to be youth through young adulthood/engagement with the latter being defined as age 18 going forward to age 32. Therefore those preparing the White Paper for PROXIMATE PREPARATION thought it might be useful to include the “Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults”, November 1996, USCCB – see below).



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

### ***Sons and Daughters of the Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults***

*November 12, 1996, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

(Edited for use with Bishops Task Force on Marriage – PROXIMATE Preparation)

#### **PART ONE: THE YOUNG ADULT**

##### **Who Are Young Adults?**

As we mentioned in our dedication, young adulthood refers to people in their late teens, twenties, and thirties; single, married, divorced, or widowed; and with or without children.<sup>9</sup> They are present in every trade and profession. They live in the many communities that make up our society—from rural areas to small towns to large metropolitan areas. They come from diverse cultural, ethnic, educational, vocational, social, political, and spiritual realities. This diversity is reflected in the large number of people from various nations coming to this country whose median age is in the early to mid-twenties.<sup>10</sup>

Young adults were raised with music, television, and the rapid explosion of information and technology. They are a generation that some social scientists call the first truly multicultural and multimedia generation.<sup>11</sup> They live in a society where access to technology can easily determine one's potential for success. More than previous generations, they feel the widening separation between those who have access to resources and those who are denied such resources because of poverty, lack of education, and discrimination.

Young adults undertake numerous developmental tasks as they continue to grow and mature.<sup>12</sup> Many first experience autonomy and discover new roles in family, work, society, and the Church as they begin college, their first job, or marriage. Today many young adults spend longer periods in transition. Marriage is delayed; children come later in life; geographic and job mobility is high; and second and third careers are common. Some find themselves single again through separation, divorce, or the death of a spouse. Some may find themselves raising children alone. When we consider all these factors, it is easy to understand why many young adults believe that life today is different. An effective ministry pays attention to these issues.

##### **Tasks of Young Adulthood**

During our meetings, young adults spoke of many concerns, which can be grouped into four key areas: *personal identity, relationships, work, and spiritual life*. While these concerns are not new to young adults, life today is different in two ways: these tasks are undertaken over an extended period of time, for some, into their thirties; and there is a lack of family, civic, and pastoral institutions to support them.

##### **1. Developing Personal Identity**

While individuals continue to mature throughout life, various new experiences influence the development of personal identity. These new experiences include employment, changing relationships with the family of origin, a continuous maturation or "ownership" of their faith, leaving the family home and possibly relocating to another area, affirmation of ethnic and



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

cultural identity, and development of new relationships at work, at home, or on campus. Many young adults—some for the first time—meet people of different faiths, values, cultures, and sexual orientation. When they meet this broader mix of people, young adults can, at times, find their values and beliefs challenged....

### **2. Developing Relationships**

#### *Making Friends and Developing Intimacy*

During the young adult years, friendships that developed during adolescence often change. Some relationships deepen, others fade. At the same time, new relationships are formed within ethnic communities and around church activities, hobbies, sports, work, or school.... Some single young adults make friends through the workplace, church, or the health club while others speak of the pain of being alone in a crowd. These young adults, who are not able to surround themselves with friends and family, struggle with much loneliness.

#### *Reordering of Relationships within the Family of Origin*

The relationships that young adult men and women have with their parents change as they move into a more adult relationship with them. While these changes signal a reordering within the family, it will always be true that "the family and the home are where we learn who we are. It is the family that teaches us much about ourselves. It is the family that is the first school and the first laboratory for the transmission of culture, the passing on of values, the handing down of traditions, the planting of the seed of faith and the proclamation of the Good News."<sup>16</sup> Many young adults who during their adolescence sought independence and a certain distance from parents begin to appreciate them in a new way—as role models, mentors, and friends. Others must come to terms with patterns of destructive family behavior that resulted from substance and other abuses during their childhood and adolescent years. A few young adults even become the economic and emotional support for their parents.

Many young adults struggle with the tension between differences in contemporary culture and the cultural heritage of their families. Young adults from diverse cultures have "distinct and unique perspectives, values and traditions relating to family and family life"<sup>17</sup> that they wish to preserve. Because of the process of acculturation, this can result in struggles between generations over which traditions to keep and which to adapt or combine.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Integrating Sexuality into Life*

As they engage in and deepen their relationships with others, young adults seek to integrate sexuality into their lives. They seek to discern how their values and religious beliefs should inform their decisions around sexuality. Because of such pervasive practices as non-marital intercourse, living together outside of marriage, and sexual abuse, many express concern about how to sustain a positive attitude and Christian wisdom regarding sexuality.



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

### *Choosing to Marry*

During the young adult years, many men and women marry and begin a family. Many newly married couples speak of delaying the start of a family to deepen their relationship, to find work, or to become more financially stable. Some tell us that they value children but wonder about bringing children into a world marked with so much pain and evil. Couples from different cultures face challenges identifying which traditions and customs to follow and deciding how to raise their children.

Others are concerned with marital stability in a society where nearly one-half of the marriages end in separation or divorce. They know from the experiences of divorced parents, grandparents, siblings, and friends that this experience is very painful. They approach marriage seriously. Some speak of the challenge of raising children as a single parent. Others share the pain of being separated from full communion with the church community as a result of remarriage or being in relationships not recognized by the Church.

### *The Single Life*

Another difference in the lives of young adults today is the number of men and women who remain single throughout their lifetime. For some, this is a conscious decision to focus their lives on their careers or work or to dedicate themselves to others through community service. Others remain single because they do not find compatible spouses. The experience can be very painful, but it can also lead the single person to a greater level of maturity.

Single young adults have very different needs and interests from those who are engaged or married, with or without children. These single men and women work to identify what gives meaning to their lives in a way that is different from those who are married or have a religious vocation. The quest for close friendships and participation in small groups or communities of like people is particularly important. Young adults form these relationships even while realizing that they may be temporary, due to the transient nature of young adult life.

### **3. Developing a Meaning of Work**

Young men and women speak of work as fulfilling a function and providing meaning. Work allows young adults to meet their practical needs but even more importantly to seek meaning and fulfillment of their dreams and visions. Although work may not help achieve their dreams, it is important for young adults to nurture a vision, learn how to work in a truly personal and life-giving way, and to continue to discern God's call.<sup>19</sup> ....

### *Work as Meaningful*

In Christian theology, work is directed to bringing the Gospel to the world. It can give meaning to our lives and can provide an opportunity to collaborate with God in building a culture of life within society. Meaning in work comes through choosing a career, volunteering, and discerning a vocation...





## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

Work includes not only what one does to earn a living and support a family but also countless hours and energy spent volunteering one's time and talent within the social, civic, and church community. Today, more people of all ages seek volunteer work as a way of meeting people and contributing to the community.

Young adults participate in volunteer work for a number of reasons, sometimes because of the difficulty of getting a job but more often out of the desire to be of service. Volunteering is an avenue where people can achieve their dream of contributing to the common good—of making a difference in the world today and embracing an enlarged vision of the world and their role as citizens.... Volunteering touches the experiential side of life where it can be most helpful to men and women who are in the process of discerning God's calling.

The ultimate search for a meaning and a spirituality of work in a Christian context is a response to God's call, which is our vocation. This response reflects the spiritual dimension of work. God calls each of us to spread the Gospel through a particular vocation. An important decision for young adults is the discernment of this call. In the past, young people made a vocation choice typically during late adolescence or their early twenties. Today many men and women undertake this discernment in their twenties and thirties, often leading to a decision to marry, remain single, or embrace a vocation to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, or lay ministry.

### **4. Developing a Spiritual Life**

What does it mean for young adults to be a "spiritual" person? Our listening sessions with young adults paint a picture of four characteristics.

1. Grappling with questions about the purpose of life and what it means to be a good person.
2. Appropriating and internalizing the gift of faith and a religious tradition.
3. Finding an adult faith community in which to live.
4. Developing an "inner life" to correspond to an "outer life."

These characteristics can be expressed as a desire of young adults to root their lives in something that gives them hope and conveys meaning. Their search for a personal identity, pursued in relationships and work, partially satisfies this hunger for meaning. However, time and time again they told us of their thirst for a relationship with God. They ask, "What is the purpose of my life? What do I live for?"

Young adult men and women experience a spiritual tension arising from the contrast between contemporary society and the desire to live according to the will of God. They speak at times of wariness toward organized religion. Although they desire a deeper spiritual life, this attitude and other influences from contemporary society push them to question and doubt what has been part of their lives. The Church needs to respond to this doubting and questioning by encouraging a dialogue that welcomes challenges from the young adult to the Church and from the Church to the young adult, so that each may grow in discipleship.



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

Young adults gradually come to understand this searching as a dynamic between faith and life. Each person internalizes this according to his or her own family history and cultural roots. Asians, Hispanics, and Latinos see their spirituality springing from their relationship with God, community, faith, and culture. African American men and women see spirituality as "rooted in the African tradition and in the historical and cultural experience of black Americans."<sup>20</sup> A common thread is the understanding of spirituality as a "way of life of a people, a movement by the Spirit of God, and the grounding of one's identity as a Christian in every circumstance of life."<sup>21</sup>

Some experience this searching as a quiet inner questioning, a thoughtful reexamination of traditional beliefs. Others accomplish this by learning more about their faith or by participating in prayer groups and small communities. For still others, this searching can lead to a functional atheism, a rejection of organized religion, or a distancing from church activities and worship. This questioning should be seen as a path that leads to possible future faith development.

During this period of searching, there are many challenges. College students, along with those in the work force, speak of having their faith challenged by fundamentalists or agnostics. Many are attracted to these people because of the conviction present in their message. Others speak of being challenged by secular messages portrayed through television, music, movies, and the news media. Some even speak of the pain they experience from parishes that are in-hospitable or unresponsive to their concerns and struggles.

Despite the turbulence of these years, many seek to return to their faith, remembering the positive experiences of youth and campus ministry. They tell us that it is our tradition that feeds their hunger. They return seeking participation and involvement in church life and guidance for their lives. Young adults need opportunities to share their stories and be affirmed in the importance of their lives within the Church. What is important to them and holds great value is being with people who have similar beliefs.<sup>22</sup> This common bond, shared within a community of peers and others, provides support and nourishment for their faith. The Church needs to provide young adults with the support, prayer, time, and space to search fruitfully and to nurture the movement toward deeper faith.<sup>23</sup>



**Study Questions for Discussion at Meeting – FOCUS ON PROXIMATE  
PREPARATION**

1. For purposes of this study, how should the time of proximate preparation for marriage be defined?
2. What challenges has the cultural retreat from traditional marriage and family life had on the stage of proximate preparation?
3. What are the struggles that young adults face today regarding vocational discernment?
4. What do Church documents identify as the components critical to a proper understanding of marriage and family during the time of proximate preparation?



## Diocese of La Crosse, WI Task Force on Marriage

---

5. What were your thoughts on the following from the Pontifical Council on Marriage, 1996

“42. For this kind of multifaceted and harmonious preparation, the persons who will be in charge will have to be identified and given adequate formation. It would be useful to create a group, on different levels, of pastoral workers who are aware of being sent by the Church. This group should be composed of Christian married couples in particular, and include experts possibly in medicine, law, psychology, with a priest who will prepare them for the roles they will play.”

6. What actions/strategies are needed in our diocese in order to best promote a proper understanding of marriage and family during the time of proximate preparation?