

Cohabitation Policy Recommendations

Step 1: At the beginning of the marriage preparation process, the living arrangement of the couple is to be determined. If the couple is living together, this matter is noted for further discussion as part of the couple's preparation for sacramental marriage.

Step 2: Cohabitation is to be discussed in light of the results of the Fully Engaged inventory, particularly in view of the couple's quality of communication, interpersonal intimacy, commitment and relationship with the Church. A healthy discussion should include how their decision affects:

- Their discernment process, so they are entering into the sacrament wholeheartedly
- Their freedom to say "Yes" or "No" as to whether they are called into the sacrament with this person, understanding that marriage is an exclusive, faithful, and indissoluble union, that they are entering a valid marriage.
- Their participation in their faith and their desire and ability to participate in the life of the Church and parish community
- Their ability to follow the Church's teachings, by living in a chaste relationship, refraining from sexual activity prior to marriage
- Their witness to the sacrament itself, to their family and friends, their community and society

This discussion will aid the pastor to understand the couple's individual dynamics and history, how their decision has affected their families of origin, their growth as a couple, particularly the practice of their faith.

Step 3: The couple will be challenged to separate and practice chastity for a meaningful period before their wedding as part of their willingness to make a commitment to sacramental marriage in the Church. If there are grave reasons for them to remain living together, they will be challenged to live in a chaste relationship, refraining from sexual activity prior to the marriage. The couple should be allowed to respond to this challenge and have their questions answered.

Step 4: The couple is given reasonable time to pray together, discuss with each other and reflect upon all the pertinent issues before stating their decision on whether or not to live separately and chastely.

Step 5: As assessment by the priest or deacon of the couple's readiness to receive the Sacrament of Marriage should be made after the couple responds to this challenge and a decision on whether to proceed or delay the marriage.