Canon 1063 — Pastors [i.e. parishes] of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by:

1° preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents;

2° personal preparation to enter marriage, which disposes the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state;

3° a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church;

4° help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family.

[The commentary offers more specific information about each of the 4 points of Canon 1063]

.... Marriage is not only a private commitment between two individuals. As a sacrament, it is a commitment before God and the church community, and it involves the good of the community. Hence, marriage should be highly esteemed and cared for by the community. The document issued by the Pontifical Council for the Family calls for the entire diocese to be involved in marriage preparation and recommends creating a "diocesan commission for marriage preparation, including a group for the pastoral care of the family."[2] The document emphasizes that marriage preparation relates not merely to the pre-marriage period but also to the couple's ongoing commitment to live out the marriage in the fullest way possible. The canon too sees marriage preparation as something that takes a lifetime.

Remote, Proximate, and Immediate Preparation

We speak of marriage preparation that is remote, proximate, and immediate. Remote preparation takes place in infancy, childhood, and adolescence, in the family, in school, and in formation groups. The purpose of this remote preparation is to "attain the goal whereby every member of the faithful called to marriage will understand completely that, in the light of God's love, human love takes on a central role in Christian ethics." Through preaching, catechesis, and social communication, children, young people, and adults can learn more about the meaning of marriage and what being a Christian spouse entails. Effective marriage preparation must begin in childhood. Children and young people who learn what the obligations of marriage are, and who learn to appreciate the importance of the sacrament, will be better able to apply those teachings to their own lives when they marry.
The canon emphasizes the importance of proximate preparation for those who are about to marry. The document issued by the Pontifical Council for the Family foresees proximate preparation as a time during which the couple will have the opportunity to deepen their faith as well as to "identify any difficulties they may have in living an authentic Christian life." Normally, proximate preparation takes place in marriage preparation courses offered by pastoral workers who have a solid formation. The preparation should include:

- 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.

By the end of this period of proximate preparation, the engaged couple should have a good idea of what marriage entails and how they will take their place in the Christian community, as well as how to "preserve and cultivate marriage love later... and how to overcome the inevitable conjugal 'crises.'"

Immediate preparation is the final stage before the wedding takes place - As the couple prepares to celebrate the marriage, they should review all they have learned and receive spiritual and liturgical preparation [NOT presentations of new content]. Immediate preparation is all the more necessary in those cases where couples have not participated in a marriage preparation course.

What of those couples who refuse to take part in marriage preparation programs? "Is preparation for the sacrament of marriage a sine qua non? Or is it only a pastoral option?" Huels notes that canon 1077, §1 could be used to delay a marriage temporarily until the couple is considered ready. However, it is very difficult to deny the celebration of a marriage only because of a couple's failure to participate in a specific marriage preparation program. One distinction that should be made is between concrete marriage preparation programs and preparation for marriage. What is important is that the couple be prepared for marriage. How that preparation takes place might not be the same for every couple. Whether a couple is prepared for marriage must be assessed individually and objectively. If the couple is not prepared, then canon 1077, §1 could be invoked and the marriage temporarily delayed. However, the basic human right to marry (c. 1058) must also be taken into account in making such a decision and in evaluating such programs.

Continued Pastoral Care after Marriage

The canon does not forget those who are already married: they too need to have continued pastoral care in order to sustain them in this vocation and to help them live it in an ever more fruitful manner. This is especially important during the first five years of married life as the couple is adjusting to their new responsibilities as married people and possibly as parents. Continued pastoral care could take the form of "post-marriage courses to be carried out in parishes or deaneries."

The Vocation to the Married or to the Celibate Life
We should speak of the married vocation and the vocation to the priestly or religious life in the same context. It is important that young people understand the different vocations, and it is essential that married life be given its proper due. It is not a vocation that is secondary vis-a-vis the priestly or religious life, but the road to holiness that most of the baptized will follow.

**Obligation of the Local Ordinary to Provide Marriage Preparation**

**Canon 1064** — *It is for the local ordinary to take care that such assistance is organized fittingly, after he has also heard men and women proven by experience and expertise if it seems opportune.*

It is the local ordinary (cf. c. 134) who should ensure that appropriate forms of pre- and post-matrimonial help spoken of in the previous canon are provided. The canon is practical in stating that the ordinary should consult, if it is opportune, with men and women whose experience in these matters can help him provide the best help possible. This means that the ordinary should do more than provide generic pre-marriage courses. He should ensure that assistance appropriate to the situation of the people living in the diocese is provided. He can learn what is appropriate through the people whom he consults. Such courses or assistance should be updated regularly to keep in touch with any changing issues that should be addressed.

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[3] The Pastoral letter of the American Bishops, Marriage: Love and Live in the Divine Plan (2009) is even more specific about when proximate preparation for marriage should begin: “…Proximate preparation begins around puberty and involves a more specific preparation for the sacraments, including an understanding of healthy relationship, sexuality, the virtue of chastity, and responsible parenthood….” [Ruhnke]

[4] This concept of “follow-up” beyond the wedding ceremony is clearly written into Canon Law. The most practical way to accomplish this is to train sponsor couples to take responsibility for this ministry. At the same time, parishes, deaneries and the Pastoral offices of the diocese need to provide “post marriage courses” for married couples. [Ruhnke]