

April 27, 2020

With this email, I am forwarding to you a number of items dealing with marriage preparation and marriage celebration in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please find attached several documents on this topic. They from Kate Wilson, director of the diocesan Family Life Office.

I draw your attention particularly to the attachment entitled *Wedding April 24 COVID-19 Marriage Updates*. It is a letter from Kate Wilson specifically addressed to the priests and deacons of our diocese. The other attachments contain information that may be helpful to you and to the couples with whom you are working.

For your quick reference, below is current summary of the COVID-19 Marriage Preparation and Wedding policies currently in force in the Diocese of Erie during this COVID-19 crisis:

- Marriage preparation sessions are, as much as possible, to be done by video conferencing – not through in-person meetings.
- Couples whose weddings are scheduled anytime up through December 31, 2020 are dispensed from making a marriage preparation retreat (Pre-Cana, Engagement Encounter, or NOVA). More details are found in the attached letter.
- Even though the requirement for Pre-Cana, Engagement Encounter or Nova is dispensed, **the obligation to conduct the pre-nuptial investigation remains in place**. Consequently, the marriage forms must still be completed as usual (with the understanding that you may not be able to obtain signatures).
- Wedding ceremonies may continue to take place; however they are limited to 10 persons in total (including clergy).
- Couples must have a valid marriage license from a Pennsylvania county courthouse before the wedding may take place.
- Once social-distancing norms have been relaxed, couples may have a larger celebration - but without a new exchange of vows - to which family, friends, wedding party, etc., may be invited. This liturgical celebration, which may take place within Mass or within a Liturgy of the Word service is to follow an appropriate adaptation of "The Order of Blessing a Married Couple". It can be found in the *Book of Blessings* or in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* ritual book. These liturgical celebrations may not include a renewal of vows or anything resembling a reenactment of the actual wedding ceremony.
- Couples are not to be advised to celebrate the civil wedding first, and the canonical wedding at a later time.

Once again, thanks for all that you are doing in these difficult days to minister to those entrusted to your care. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or Father Singer, or Kate Wilson in the Family Life Office.

Sincerely,  
Msgr. Edward M. Lohse  
Vicar General