



Office of the Bishop

*Diocese of Erie
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Feast of St. Mary Magdalene
July 22, 1992

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As of this day, I am instituting a policy for weddings and baptisms that take place in the chapels of this diocese. Even though the reasons for this policy are given below, I would like to state that the primary reason is to underscore the importance of the local parish, allowing it to become the primary place of the sacramental celebrations of our faith community.

I am asking each of you to make this policy public through the communications network in your parish. Often, people when faced with a conflict will claim that they never heard of the regulations. It will be to your advantage to do this promptly and clearly.

I will treat the topic under three headings: a preface, the reasons for the policy, and the policy itself.

PREFACE

"The pastor is the proper shepherd of the parish entrusted to him, exercising pastoral care in the community entrusted to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share; in accord with the norm of law he carries out for his community the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing, with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and the assistance of lay members of the parish council." (CL 519)

In order to emphasize the centrality of the parish and the ministry of the pastor as the ordinary manifestation of the local church, the Diocese of Erie is setting a policy which regulates the administration of the sacraments (primarily Baptism and Marriage) in chapels which fall within the boundaries of a parish.

The term "chapel" includes motherhouses of religious orders, priories, campus chapels, hospital chapels, and chapels in other institutions. Since these chapels are not parishes of themselves, and are unable to supply complete pastoral service, members of faculties and/or staffs should be registered in a local parish. Weekly worship and other ministry may take place at the nearby campus or institution.

Pastors are encouraged to provide opportunities in their parish activities for young adults between the years of college and marriage. Even before sacramental needs for their children, young people can be attracted to participation in the parish and can generously offer their gifts in ministry.

REASONS FOR THE POLICY

1. to allow the parish to be the center of the faith life of the people in this diocese;
2. to allow the Sacrament of Baptism to be the rite of initiation into a particular faith community;
3. to underscore the theology of sacraments as public and communal;
4. to underscore a sacramental theology which sees the sacraments as actions directly involving the community, and not as "things" which people get by going to church;
5. to allow a completion of the Sacrament of Baptism with the proper religious formation and the sacraments of Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance;
6. to encourage young people to register in a parish and to participate in the activities of the parish, thus making that parish become the primary faith community.

Chapels in religious houses and on Catholic campuses are "oratories" in the canonical sense of the term, and are established for the divine worship for the benefit of a particular community. (They are not to take the place of a parish church, nor do they enjoy the same status.) Other activities such as weddings between parties of Protestant and other faiths would be inappropriate. Obviously, all weddings involving Roman Catholics must be in accord with the provisions of the Diocesan Marriage Policy, and thereby be licit and valid.

POLICY

- A. In campus chapels- campus chapels of both secular universities and catholic colleges and universities

- WEDDINGS:
1. limited to students, faculty, staff, and graduates of less than five years*;
 2. must follow the Diocesan Marriage Policy;
 3. the priest who is to witness the marriage must have the express delegation of the pastor of the parish in which the chapel is located;

4. the pre-nuptial file must be located in and the marriage recorded in the parish in which the chapel of the college or institution is located.

*Permission may be granted for those graduates of more than 5 years who have demonstrated registration and participation in a parish.

BAPTISMS are not permitted -- unless a unique situation arises, and which will receive the express permission of the diocesan bishop, notification of the proper pastor, and recording in the proper parish. Obviously, if the campus conducts an RCIA process according to the ritual of the Church, the Sacraments of Initiation are celebrated.

B. In oratories, priories, motherhouses, hospital and prison chapels:

WEDDINGS AND BAPTISMS forbidden -- without express permission of the diocesan bishop -- and, when permitted by exception, must follow the requirements listed above.

I have sought the advice, and received unanimously the endorsement of the Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Administrative Cabinet and Campus Ministers.

I thank you for your assistance in making this policy part of the daily practice in our parishes and chapels. My prayer is that this policy will center the sacraments in communities of faith which will initiate, form, and send forth members who have richly benefited from these sacraments, and who will become sacramental encounters for our diocese.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

+ Donald W. Trautman

Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL
Bishop of Erie