



## DIOCESE OF ERIE

429 East Grandview Boulevard  
Post Office Box 10397  
Erie, Pennsylvania 16514-0397  
Phone 814-824-1111  
FAX 814-824-1124

April 24, 2020

Dear Monsignor, Father or Deacon,

In light of the many changing COVID19 directives, I wanted to use one space to compile the most recent information for those of you working with engaged couples.

- **The latest diocesan guidelines:**
  - o Weddings may take place with 10 or fewer participants (including minister, musicians, etc.) who maintain proper social distance. (In effect until at least May 8, 2020)
  - o Weddings may be live-streamed.
  - o In the case that a couple has a small wedding following social distancing guidelines now, they may have a larger celebration and reception later, for example around their first anniversary. In that case, a Mass of Blessing of a Couple on the Occasion of an Anniversary should be used, following the formula in the back of the *Order of Celebrating Marriage* book and in the *Book of Blessings*.
  - o Couples cannot reenact their wedding later. The anniversary celebration of a wedding may include a blessing for the couple, but *may not* include reenacting, repeating or renewing vows (c.f. canon 1127 §3).
  - o The civil and sacramental aspects of a marriage may not be separated. A couple cannot be sacramentally married without a civil license in our diocese.
  - o Engagement Encounter, NOVA and Pre-Cana retreats have been canceled. (In effect until at least July 1, 2020)
- **Marriage licenses:** Some county courthouses in Pennsylvania are closed until mid-May, while others have found creative ways to issue marriage licenses. Please see the attached document that lists each of the 13 counties in the Diocese of Erie and their current procedure for license applications. It is lawful in the state of Pennsylvania to use the civil license from one county to be married in another county.
- **Marriage preparation meetings with clergy:**
  - o During this time of social distancing, Bishop Persico is encouraging priests to do the marriage preparation meetings with couples via video conferencing when at all possible. This includes FOCCUS follow-up meetings and the completion of MA forms. A guide for discussing FOCCUS remotely can be found here:  
<https://files.constantcontact.com/227f1ef4701/d2e057d1-5507-4414-bb4f-edcfff9ac48f.pdf>

- Also available free software includes [Zoom](#) and [Google Hangouts](#). Tutorials are linked above. You may call or email me if you would like help setting up either platform.
- **Online marriage preparation options:** For couples who are having difficulty attending a Pre-Cana or Engagement Encounter due to social distancing restrictions, the following online marriage preparation options have been vetted and can be used. The option to offer private instruction, of course, is still available.
  - [Better Together](#) by Dynamic Catholic
    - Pro: Up-to-date, visually appealing and high-quality content. Video and discussion guides included. Free.
    - Cons: No accountability (certificate, test, etc.) Clergy would need to talk with couples.
  - [Living Our Faith in Love](#) by the Marriage Group
    - Pros: Quality content and up-to-date videography. Video, discussion guides, simple questions after videos to affirm that couples were able to watch the video and understand major points, and certificate of completion. The Marriage group handles all tech questions with couples directly.
    - Cons: Course costs \$200, but they are offering 20% during COVID19.
- **Bishop Persico recorded a message for couples** whose weddings are impacted because of coronavirus efforts to keep everyone safe and healthy. Please consider passing it on to the couples you are working with who are affected. <https://youtu.be/lkcepayo8Z0>
- The Marriage and Family Life Office developed **resources for engaged couples impacted by COVID19**. They are all on the Marriage and Family Life Office [website](#), and are also attached to this email. They can be emailed directly to couples.
  - Wedding Planning During COVID19 overview sheet
  - Discussion tips to help couples make difficult decisions
  - Wedding Options guide
  - Honor the Day: celebrating pre-wedding festivities and original wedding dates while honoring social distancing guidelines
  - Wedding planning stress management

Thank you for walking with all of your parishioners and for reaching out to engaged couples during this time. Your contact is meaningful to them.

Blessings and prayers,

Kate Wilson  
 Director of Marriage and Family Life  
[kwilson@eriercd.org](mailto:kwilson@eriercd.org)