

# Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry Information and Instructions

## Information

Canon 1067: *The conference of bishops is to establish norms about the examination of spouses and about the marriage banns or other opportune means to accomplish the investigations necessary before marriage. After these norms have been diligently observed, the pastor can proceed to assist at the marriage.*

In 2000, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), known at the time as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, was granted *recognitio* by the Congregation for Bishops regarding the investigation of freedom to marry for the following norm:

*The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of canon 1067 and with due regard for canon 1068, hereby decrees that the following norms shall be observed in preparation of a couple for marriage:*

- (1) The couple should receive appropriate education and pastoral preparation through participation in a marriage preparation program approved by the diocesan bishop;*
- (2) Parties should be questioned as to their freedom to marry;*
- (3) Baptized Catholics should present a recently issued annotated baptismal certificate;*
- (4) Where necessary, additional documentation (such as affidavits of parents) attesting to a Catholic party's freedom to marry should be presented;*
- (5) Baptized non-Catholics should present satisfactory proof of baptism and freedom to marry;*
- (6) Unbaptized persons should present satisfactory proof of freedom to marry;*
- (7) Preparation for marriage should be in conformity with the prescriptions of canon 1063 (regarding what must precede marriage) and canons 1064, 1071, 1072, 1086, §2 and 1125, which entrust certain situations to the special care of local ordinaries;*
- (8) Preparation for marriage should be in compliance with appropriate civil laws.*

The Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, in accordance with no. (4)-(6) above, has determined that the marriage preparation form **Witness Concerning Freedom to Marry (WCFM)** accomplishes the investigation necessary to prove the freedom to marry.

## Instructions

1. Mail or Email the WCFM form to the witness.<sup>1</sup> Tell them not to fill it out.
2. If emailed, the witness prints out the blank form.
3. The witness brings the form to his or her local Catholic parish/installation (not a local civil notary or non-Catholic minister – these will be rejected).<sup>2</sup>
4. The witness meets in-person (i.e., face-to-face, in the physical presence of) the Catholic pastoral minister<sup>3</sup> (not remotely over video conference).
5. The witness hands the Catholic pastoral minister the blank form.
6. The Catholic pastoral minister verbally asks for the information and the witness answers. The Catholic pastoral minister records the answers on the form.
7. Once completed, both sign the form with wet ink signatures.
8. The **original** form (not copies) is to be mailed (not emailed) to the priest overseeing the marriage preparation who adds it to the prenuptial paperwork file.

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<sup>1</sup> The witness may be Catholic or non-Catholic, but they must give testimony in-person to a Catholic pastoral minister since the latter is to receive the testimony with a Catholic understanding of marriage. This is about canonical testimony, not the faith or denomination of the witness. In other words, it is not about the witness, but about testifying to the truth of the canonical status of the person intending to marry. Therefore, if a non-Catholic witness is chosen, he or she must be instructed to go to the local Catholic parish/installation to give testimony.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of “free to marry” is specific to the Catholic Church, and may not be understood correctly by other non-Catholic Christian ministers or civil notaries.

<sup>3</sup> The Catholic pastoral minister may be a priest, deacon, Catholic Pastoral Life Coordinator or equivalent at the parish or installation.