



**ON TIME AND
ON TARGET**
**Completing marriage
paperwork in a timely and
complete manner**

The most important least important part of marriage preparation is the canonical paperwork. Pastoral ministers rightly tend to focus their efforts on preparing couples spiritually and personally to undertake the awesome vocation of married life. Unfortunately, this approach can lead ministers to neglect the canonical paperwork until the last minute, potentially resulting in disaster.

That is about the time they contact us at the tribunal expecting us to work a miracle. While we have a highly competent staff who do amazing things, miracles fall under another department. Our job is simply to apply the law, toward which end we once again ask pastoral ministers to complete and, when necessary, submit to us the canonical paperwork for marriage in a timely and complete manner.

According to the *Common Policy for Marriage in the Diocese of Erie*, the required marriage paperwork should be completed at the second meeting between the couple and the pastoral minister. Since marriage preparation should begin about six months before the wedding date, this second meeting should reasonably take place well before the wedding.

At that meeting, the pastoral minister should complete the basic pre-marital investigation, or M-A form, with the couple. This form should be completed thoroughly, answering each question (except for the question asking about the last time someone celebrated the sacrament of Penance, which should be omitted). If either party is non-Catholic, then the minister will also need to complete two M-B forms for that person, and, if the Catholic party lives in or the wedding will take place in another diocese, two M-B's for the Catholic party as well. The M-B's should be completed as soon as possible after completing the M-A with the couple.

In addition to the M-A and M-B forms, the minister should also secure updated, annotated copies of Catholic

parties' baptismal certificates from the church where they were baptized. If either party had a prior marriage, proof that it was declared null by a qualified tribunal or proof of the death of their former spouse, such as a death certificate, should also be secured as soon as possible after completing the M-A.

If no permission or dispensation is required, there is no need to send the paperwork to our office. If a permission or dispensation is required, the minister should fill out that section on the M-A as well, including the reason/s for requesting it. The *complete* paperwork, should then be sent to our tribunal office *no later than one month prior to the wedding*. This should also be done if the wedding will take place in another diocese.

That's it for now. Until next time, please complete marriage paperwork in a timely and complete manner, keep the faith, love God's people, and always honor the code!

