

**Marriages Authorization Process for a
Parish Ministry Associate in Nebraska Synod, ELCA**

January 7, 2023

Because it is an increasing challenge to provide ordained clergy to preside at weddings as well as at regular eucharistic worship services, the bishop and PMA Steering Committee of Nebraska Synod agree to permit assigned PMAs to solemnize marriages, subject to the following requirements being met:

1. The right is reserved only to those PMAs currently authorized to serve in a pastoral leadership capacity (i.e., assigned by the bishop to serve a congregation in place of a pastor for regular or transitional ministry) or in the role of pastoral staff in a multiple-point parish with multiple ministerial staff (i.e. not simply being on staff in a congregation, even if that involves worship leadership).
2. The right is reserved (as clearly stated in the Bishops' Relational Agreement) exclusively to the congregation where the PMA is assigned, with the congregation's concurrence, only for members of that congregation.
3. The right is reserved only to those PMAs who have received preparation and whose authorization from the bishop specifically includes this right (as is the case with presiding at funerals).
4. Preparation would include instruction in premarital counseling (Prepare/Enrich is the only curriculum approved by PMA Steering Committee), basic law regarding marriage, and worship planning for weddings.
5. The right would be restricted to the period and location covered by the authorization (i.e., if the PMA's assignment and/or authorization ends, so does the right to preside at marriages).
6. PMAs who violate the restrictions are liable not only to ecclesial discipline (which will likely include revocation of certification) but to civil prosecution and litigation.

Following are the three steps you must take to request authorization to solemnize marriages.

1. Be trained as facilitator of the Prepare/Enrich pre-marital counseling resource.

From the Prepare/Enrich website: "Certification is the first step to using P/E: Becoming certified allows you to gain the knowledge and skills to most effectively use the P/E assessment in your work with couples. You will be able to access resources you need to become proficient in the use of P/E."

You have **two options for receiving training**: on-line or a live workshop.

For **on-line training**, go to www.prepare-enrich.com, click on "Be A Facilitator" for information on the cost of training, how to register, and how to receive the certification. Please contact the PMA office before you begin the process. Once you have completed

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the course, please send a copy of your course completion certificate to the PMA Administrator.

Information on **live workshops** in Nebraska Synod will be sent to you in the last half of January. These workshops take about eight hours, and the registration fee is currently \$175 to \$200. You may also attend any live workshop offered through the Prepare/Enrich website.

2. Complete a preparation workshop with your supervisor.

Within four weeks of completing your Prepare/Enrich training you must meet with your supervisor, or another ELCA pastor if your supervisor is not available, and review the following aspects of ministry practice related to pre-marital work, the rehearsal, and the wedding service itself. Within one week of completing this workshop, the pastor who facilitated the workshop must send the PMA Office a completed continuing education report confirming that you have successfully completed the workshop.

Topics to be discussed include, but are not limited to:

Congregation Matters

1. What is the wedding policy of the congregation?
2. Developing a wedding policy, with the council, if one does not exist. Updating an old wedding policy.
2. What is the congregation's policy on same-sex marriages in that church or outside of it? If no policy exists, when, how, and why might one ask to start such a conversation and discernment process?
3. Does or should the congregation have a wedding coordinator? What is this person's role? Working with a wedding coordinator.
4. When are fees required by the congregation or minister paid by the couple?
5. Does the minister keep an honorarium or give it to the congregation?

Pre-Marital Counseling & Planning Needs

1. Why pre-marital counseling is required.
2. How to handle couples who don't take the counseling seriously.
3. How many sessions should there be?
4. Working with a couple that is reluctant to talk or an individual that dominates the conversation.
5. Why it is important to talk about money and sex, covered in the Prepare/Enrich material.
6. Making clear with the couple the fees required by the congregation and minister. Securing payment. Loaning out keys to the church for decorators, and getting them back.
7. Communicating to the couple the expectation that the wedding party will not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol before or during the rehearsal and wedding, and the consequences for breaking this policy.
8. Discussing the party bus and other activities that take the wedding party away from the guests for long periods of time between the end of the wedding and the start of the reception.

9. When is it best to have photos taken on the day of the wedding?

Rehearsals

1. Who should be at rehearsal?
2. How to start and run a rehearsal. Establishing expectations of behavior (paying attention, no drinking/drugs/smoking, cell phones off, and a timeline for the rehearsal.
3. Who determines the order of persons in the procession and where they stand or sit in the sanctuary?
4. How to handle an over enthusiastic or controlling mother-of-the-bride, bridesmaid, etc? Or one who is quite disengaged.
5. Blended families: seating, participation, and other considerations for step-parents, divorced parents, step-children, etc.
6. If invited, do you attend the rehearsal dinner? What is your role?

The Wedding Service

1. Establishing the wedding service as a worship service first and foremost.
2. Helping the couple plan the service—selecting scriptures, vows, hymns, etc.
3. How to handle couples that want to write their own vows.
4. The place of secular music or readings that aren't from the Bible.
5. Whether recorded music can be used.
6. Proactively setting boundaries with the photographer, limiting their whereabouts and flash photography during the wedding.
7. Where should the minister be before and during the wedding, the lighting of a unity candle, the receiving line, etc.
8. How to handle issues with alcohol, drugs, cell phone before and during the service.
9. If invited, do you attend the wedding reception? What is your role?

Follow-Up

1. When to have the couple and witnesses sign the marriage license.
2. Who should be the witnesses to sign the marriage license?
3. When to give the couple their souvenir/non-legal copy of the marriage license.
4. When to mail the signed marriage license back to the courthouse (after fees are paid and keys are returned).

3. Send a written request for authorization to solemnize marriages to the PMA Office via US Mail or to pma@nebraskasynod.org

Requests for authorization can only be considered if the PMA Office has a copy of your certificate for completing Prepare/Enrich and the workshop report from the pastor who facilitated it.