



MARRIAGE CATECHUMENATE

Office of Marriage and Family Life
DIOCESE OF LANSING

*Relazioni
1994*



SUMMARY

Marriage is a specification of the baptismal call to holiness, discipleship, and service. Building on the work of Bishop Boyea and the entire diocese over recent years, our marriage preparation needs to be structured so as to form disciples who will build their domestic churches for the glory of God.

Beginning with St. John Paul II in 1981 and with the recent synods on the family and Pope Francis' document *Amoris Laetitia*, the Church has moved toward an understanding of marriage preparation as a type of catechumenate. This would require us to ground marriage preparation more intentionally in its aim of putting people in communion with Jesus Christ, in emphasizing its connections to the other sacraments, and the inclusion of the whole ecclesial community. It would mean forming them in the essentials of living marriage, that is, human and relational formation, as well as sacramental and catechetical formation. Finally, it would introduce a period of purification and synthesis and ongoing reflection and formation after the wedding day.

With these guiding principles in mind, the following are marriage preparation requirements in the Diocese of Lansing beginning February 14, 2021.

STEP 1. MEETING WITH THE PARISH MARRIAGE/ FAMILY LEADERSHIP (PASTOR, DEACON, OR MARRIAGE CATECHUMENATE COORDINATOR)

- The following is a recommended order of action to reduce the amount of meetings an engaged couple would need before they set the date of their wedding. However, a parish could opt to have the initial meeting, have the couple take the inventory, and then have a second meeting to discuss the marriage catechumenal process and choose a date:
 - After the couple contacts the parish to begin their preparation, their first step should be taking a pre-marriage inventory. (Ex. FOCCUS or Prepare/Enrich). The reports are then given to the pastor or marriage catechumenate coordinator, highlighting possible issues, ahead of their first meeting with the couple.
 - The couple meets the pastor or marriage catechumenate coordinator, are introduced to the process of preparation, and intake paper work is completed, including the M-A Form. The marriage catechumenate should begin once it is determined, via the M-A Form, that there are no impediments that would require Tribunal action.
 - The pastor or marriage catechumenate coordinator discerns with the couple a timeframe that takes into account their specific needs pertaining to their readiness for marriage. This discernment will take into account the results of their intake forms, inventory interviews, and assessment of needs for formation in life skills and discipleship.
 - As part of this initial interview, questions should be asked of the couple to determine their history with abuse, addictions, depression, etc. This may be accomplished as part of the intake form.

STEP 2. CHOOSE A MENTOR COUPLE AND BEGIN MEETING WITH THEM

- The couple chooses their mentor couple and begins meeting with them using the *Witness to Love* program.

STEP 3. ATTEND THE ENCOUNTER EXPERIENCE

- The couple schedules and attends an encounter experience at the parish or neighboring parish

STEP 4. ATTEND ANY FORMATION SESSIONS OR COUNSELING AS NEEDED

- The pastor or marriage catechumenate coordinator works with the couple to design their formation program in three main areas:
 - Catechesis of Marriage
 - (Please see the appendix for a list of programming options.)
 - Life skills and NFP
 - This includes a session of the *A Lasting Promise* program and any other programs or counseling related to addictions, mental health, personal maturity, or financial management as the pastor deems necessary. (Please see the appendix for a list of programming options.)
 - Liturgical Catechesis and liturgy planning
 - The goal is to instruct the couple so that they might understand more fully the rite of matrimony itself and thus enact their role as the ministers of the sacrament with full knowledge.

STEP 5. FINAL PREPARATIONS

- Follow up meeting with pastor or marriage catechumenate coordinator reviewing what they've done and initiating the Purification & Synthesis stage
- Attend a pre-marriage retreat/event for recollection and reflection

STEP 6. WEDDING DAY

STEP 7. LIVING MARRIAGE

- On-going small groups, marriage strengthening, and 1st year of marriage events and resources.
- A gift could also be given of resources (talks, books, videos) to the couple.



Introduction



Marriage is the most beautiful thing that God has created.”¹ In marriage, two persons are united in such a way that they become one reality. (cf. Gen 2:24) Within this new reality, the call to communion, written into the soul and body of man, “from the beginning,” finds fulfillment and directs the spouses to the ultimate union with God in the Universal Call to Holiness. Love seeks to be definitive and because of the indissolubility of this covenantal union, the spouses are enabled to give themselves in such a definitive manner. Through this unbreakable union, the spouses themselves become a sacrament of God’s complete and unfailing love for mankind. Marriage is in fact, the “primordial sacrament.”² Finally, it is through this union that new families are formed and the number of God’s children grows. In his wisdom, God designed the family to reflect his creative power in that life is given and nurtured through the radical outpouring of the parents for their children. It is through the family, founded on the rock of marriage, that the dignity of the person is affirmed, nurtured, and safe guarded.

Yet, marriage and family life is a preeminently practical reality. In his impromptu address at the *Festival of Families* in Philadelphia, Pope Francis reflected on marriage and declared, “Certainly, in the family there are difficulties. In families we argue. In families sometimes we throw dishes. In families children cause headaches...Families always, always, have crosses. Always. Because the love of God, the Son of God, also asked us to follow him along this way.”³ The way, of course, is the way of discipleship. The way that Christ described when he said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24) The vocation to marriage, is, as St. John Paul II

¹ Pope Francis, *Meeting with Priests, Religious, Seminarians, and Pastoral Workers*, Tbilisi, Georgia, October 1st, 2016.

² St. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 98:1.

³ Pope Francis, *Prayer Vigil for the Festival of Families*, September 26th, 2015.

taught, a specification of the baptismal call to holiness,⁴ a vocation that brings with it its own difficulties, graces, and charisms for sanctification of spouses and children and the building up of the whole Church.

Because of this, this document intends to inspire special attention to the way we practice marriage ministry, especially the way we approach marriage preparation. We take up and address the question of Bishop Boyea in *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*, “Do [our marriage preparation programs] assist the couple to become disciples of Christ and ministers of the sacrament of marriage? Do they help couples see their role in the formation of their families into domestic churches?”⁵

Proposed in this document, is a conscious shift in the way we approach the training and ministry to engaged and married couples for the Diocese of Lansing. If marriage is a specification of the baptismal call to discipleship and holiness, then that reality should form everything we do in our ministry to families. When couples approach the Church in preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony, what they should find is a church ready to guide them in their vocational call to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

This is an opportune moment to make this shift. As a diocese we have intentionally refocused on the call to evangelization and discipleship. We are engaged in a process of reforming ourselves to answer the Gospel mandate to make disciples and to reach out to the baptized and unbaptized in the preaching of the kerygma. In the engaged, who come to our doors often unfamiliar with the Gospel call to perfection, we have a ready-made opportunity to share the good news and build up the Kingdom. As Pope Benedict XVI has taught, **“The new evangelization depends largely on the Domestic Church.”**⁶

⁴ Cf. St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 56.

⁵ Bishop Earl Boyea, *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*, no. 27.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Pontifical Council for the Family*, December 1, 2011.

Imitating the CATECHUMENATE



uring the recent synods on the family, a major theme was an approach to marriage preparation that imitated the catechumenate. Pope Francis highlighted this in an address to the Roman Rota in January of 2016: “pastoral urgency involving all Church structures is leading us toward a shared intention to provide adequate preparation for marriage in a kind of new catechumenate — I emphasize this: a kind of new catechumenate — strongly hoped for by various Synod Fathers.”⁷ He followed these words up in his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, “the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism, and the other sacraments.”⁸

This is not a new concept, however. The General Directory for Catechesis, quoting the “Message to the People of God” following the 1977 Synod of Bishops states, “The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate... in both their objectives and their dynamism.”⁹

In response to the 1977 Synod, St. John Paul II wrote *Catechesi Tradendae* where he taught “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ **In other words, our pre-nuptial catechesis needs to imitate the catechumenate, having as its goal the formation of disciples for Jesus Christ.**

Therefore, it would be appropriate to formulate a model of marriage preparation that takes the Catechumenal Model of Christian Initiation as its inspiration. From now on, in the Diocese of Lansing, we will intentionally

⁷ Pope Francis, *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To The Officials Of The Tribunal Of The Roman Rota For The Inauguration Of The Judicial Year*, January 22nd, 2016.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 206.

⁹ *General Directory for Catechesis (1998)*, p. 53.

¹⁰ St. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 5.

choose to use language that emphasizes this shift from mere preparation, to language that points to the nature of a catechumenate. The catechumenal model has four stages: Evangelization, Catechesis, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy. Our **marriage catechumenate** will seek to follow this structure.

What we have, then, is a structure, a process, rather than a program. These diocesan marriage catechumenate standards are designed to be purposefully flexible within a unified vision. These standards contain the essentials, but leave parishes and pastors the freedom to apply the vision based on the individual resources and needs of the parish and the engaged couple. These standards are the fruit of a long process of discernment which included reliance on the teaching of two popes and Bishop Boyea, input from 125 individuals involved in marriage preparation across the diocese in a series of five town hall meetings¹¹, consultation with the clergy and lay leaders, deliberations among the Diocesan Marriage Advisory Committee, and recommendations from the diocesan tribunal: Frs. David Hudgins, George Daisy, and Mark Rutherford.

Additionally, it is recommended that each parish (or cluster of parishes) have on staff, hired or volunteer, a coordinator of marriage and family life, not only to give the proper attention to engaged couples, but for the ongoing formation and pastoral care which all families require. In the words of St. John Paul II, the family is the “way of the Church” and the “Church considers serving the family to be one of her essential duties.”¹²

It must be emphasized that this is a process, not a program, just as the Baptismal Catechumenate – RCIA – is a **process**. It is easy to make distinctions and set up stages on paper, but in reality, these are peoples’ lives and so nothing is exact and rarely is there perfect clarity. What couples need is discernment and pastoral accompaniment. But, with this general outline we can build a model of **marriage catechumenate** that respects the journey of discipleship and has as its inspiration the catechumenal process.

¹¹ See Appendix C

¹² St. John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 2.

Marriage

CATECHUMENATE STANDARDS



These standards include a change to the time frame requirement from 9 months to a range of 6-12+ months depending upon the readiness of the couple. The standards also incorporate mentoring to assure that couples are being accompanied while they assume the responsibilities as married disciples. There are four distinct phases which help to assure an adequate catechumenate: Encounter with Christ, Formation, Purification and Synthesis, and Mystagogy or Living Marriage.

Time Frame Requirement (6-12+ Months):

As was suggested at several of the Town Hall Meetings and in an effort to emphasize pastoral accompaniment, the time frame required for preparation should reflect the individual couple and the preparation they need.

When an engaged couple presents themselves to be married in the Catholic Church, the initial step is a thorough interview with the pastor or the marriage catechumenate coordinator. The purpose of this initial interview is to assess their readiness for marriage and to identify the components of the marriage catechumenate process to meet this couple's needs. This assessment will include an identification of the life skills formation and the spiritual/discipleship formation that will support this couple in living out a Catholic marriage. The results of the pre-marriage inventory will be integral to this assessment.

If they come well-formed, well-catechized, and are active members of the church, they need less time than a couple who have

been inactive in the practice of the faith. Expecting every couple to fit into a standard timeframe of preparation is impractical and unjust. Several standardized tools could be employed in the discernment process such as a marriage inventory like FOCCUS or Prepare/Enrich as well as a faith inventory which could help determine the familiarity the couple has with the Catholic Faith. Every effort should be made, however, to not present such tools as “tests” of worthiness. These inventories, along with intake forms, should be completed as soon as possible after the engaged couple approaches the Church for preparation. The following examples can help in the discernment of setting a date:

- Couple A
 - The couple are intentional disciples, active in the parish life, well-catechized, pray together, attend Mass multiple times a week, go to confession regularly, and participate in the Mission of the Church and do not need counseling related to addictions, abuse, domestic violence, etc.
 - These couples will focus on formation in life skills, including, communication, conflict resolution, NFP, etc.
 - Couples in this category will be the exception.
 - Timeframe: 6-8 months
- Couple B
 - The couple are active in their faith, attend Mass every week, pray together, and have a general grasp of what the Church teaches about marriage
 - This couple will focus on formation in life skills, including, communication, conflict resolution, NFP, etc.
 - These couples may need time for counseling related to addictions, abuse, domestic violence, etc.
 - Timeframe: 9-11 months

- Couple C
 - The couple may be of mixed faith, the Catholic party attends Mass once or more a month, they have a general grasp of the teachings of Jesus, and they demonstrate a willingness to bring God into their future marriage. Growth in discipleship, reception in the sacraments, and understanding in the teachings of the Catholic Church will be a focus for this couple.
 - This couple will focus on formation in life skills, including, communication, conflict resolution, personal finance, NFP, etc.
 - This couple may need time for counseling related to substance addictions and addictions to pornography, gambling, or video games, abuse, domestic violence, etc.
 - Timeframe: 12+ months
- Couple D
 - This couple are inactive in their faith, they do not pray, they fail to demonstrate even an elementary level grasp of the truths of Catholicism. Couples in this category will require significant mentoring support, including developing a pattern of weekly mass attendance, learning patterns of prayer individually and as a couple, remedial catechesis in basic catholic teaching, especially as relates to the sacraments.
 - All other life skills components mentioned above would be included here along with any exceptional needs for counseling.
 - Timeframe: 12-18 months or more

Mentorship

As the introduction to the Order of Matrimony states, the preparation and celebration of marriage belongs, at least in part, to the “entire ecclesial community.”¹³ In addition, Pope Francis, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, described the desire of the Synod fathers that there was a “need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves.”¹⁴ Thus, each couple preparing for marriage in the diocese of Lansing, needs to be accompanied by a mentor or sponsor couple. In the past, mentorship was envisioned as a part of the marriage inventory tools that were used and the couple met with their mentor to discuss the results of the inventory. What the Church in her rites and teaching envisions seems to entail more. The mentor couple is an essential point of contact between the Church and the engaged couple and can become a “bridge of trust” in the engaged couple’s growth in faith and preparation for the sacrament. Because of this, mentorship should be more than a set program of meetings. Mentorship should imitate the role of the sponsor in the Sacraments of Initiation. It should be a holy friendship of accompaniment and a sharing in life.

The *Office of Marriage and Family Life* strongly endorses and recommends the program Witness to Love as a tool to aid in mentorship. The program envisions the roll of the mentor as a witness to what marriage lived out in the day-to-day entails and as an experienced friend who has wisdom to share. It also has a strong emphasis on the virtues and apprenticing the engaged couple to grow in those virtues. Based on pastoral experience and the psychology of attachment, the program has the couple choose their own mentor, with the assistance of the parish, rather than having a mentor assigned to them. This approach leverages the openness of the couple to trust more readily a couple they themselves chose for the simple fact that choosing your own mentor means you’ve identified an attractive quality in them that you wish to imitate.

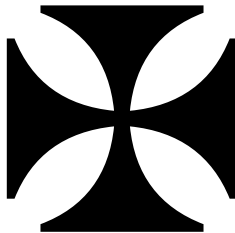
¹³ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, no. 12

¹⁴ *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 206

Witness to Love is being used in dioceses and parishes all across the country. It has been implemented in the dioceses of Detroit, San Diego, Cincinnati, Tyler, San Francisco, Baltimore, Orange, Sacramento, Phoenix, Trenton, Boise, Dubuque, Baton Rouge, Philadelphia, Columbus, Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis, Portland, OR, and many others are in the process of implementing the program. The ten or so years the program has been in existence have yielded case studies of divorce rates dropping from 23% down to less than 5% during the first five years of marriage. ¹⁵

Witness to Love conceives of the mentoring relationship as a sharing of life, rather than a guide through a program:

- The engaged couple has a mentor from the beginning of their engagement through the celebration of the sacrament and beyond into the early phase of the couple's married life.
- The engaged couple and their mentor plans experiences that emphasize the nature of the relationship as friendship and accompaniment. Possible ideas include double dates, praying together and attending mass together, shared entertainment, joining the engaged couple on their marriage formation classes, etc.
- The mentor couple should be experienced and thus married at least 5 years, attend Mass regularly, practice their faith, and be in good standing with the Church.



¹⁵ witnessloveto.org

Four Phases of the MARRIAGE CATECHUMENATE

Encounter



Foundational to the catechumenate is the proclamation of the Kerygma. Pope Francis himself has specifically identified the Kerygma as being an essential element for the preparation of marriage.¹⁶ Here in the Diocese of Lansing, we are well equipped to incorporate this element as we have been focusing on encounter opportunities in our parishes as part of Bishop Boyea's pastoral letter and initiative of evangelization. Thus, as the first step of their catechumenate, the engaged couple, and their mentor couple with them, if possible, should attend one of the many encounter opportunities available at their parish or a neighboring parish if necessary. Options could include:

- Alpha for Catholics
- Christ Renews His Parish
- Cursillo
- The Kerygma Encounter
- Christlife
- Life In the Spirit
- Kairos
- Etc.

Formation

The Formation forms the main body of content communicated to the engaged couple and is made up of three main elements; an education in life and relationship skills, a training in the spiritual and theological truth of marriage, and finally a liturgical catechesis of the *Rite of Matrimony* itself so they may best perform their function as the principle ministers of the

¹⁶ Cf., *Ibid.*, no. 207

sacrament. In practical execution, these elements do not need to follow the order listed here and may even overlap.

The first portion is made up of education in the *life skills* needed for marriage. These would include fulfilling the requirements for training in Natural Family Planning, *A Lasting Promise*, and if necessary, counseling for addictions including addictions to alcohol/drugs, pornography, gambling, etc. In addition, counseling may need to be sought for wounds caused by sexual abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, past abortions, etc. Additional elements could include personal finance, non-sexual intimacy, and methods of couple prayer.

The second is the spiritual and catechetical formation of the couple. Parishes are free to choose which programs to use from the appendix which best fit the needs of the couple and resources of the parish or parish cluster. Programming used to fulfill this requirement must be grounded in Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the Theology of the Body. (*In cases where only one party is open to the Catholic faith, efforts should be taken to accompany that person in living their marriage as a disciple.) **This phase of the catechumenate, once the couple is exposed to the Church's understanding of sexuality, is also the ideal moment to invite cohabiting couples to abstain from sexual relations or even move out of the same home, if possible.** The timing for this conversation will take pastoral discernment, but should take place no later than the beginning of Purification & Synthesis.

The final portion is a liturgical catechesis about the Order of Matrimony itself. As the Introduction to the Rite indicates, the engaged couple should be given catechesis “about the Sacrament and its rites, prayers, and readings, so that they may be able to celebrate it thoughtfully and fruitfully.”¹⁷ This catechesis can take place when the couple is choosing their readings, form of consent, blessing of the rings, Nuptial Blessing, etc.¹⁸ A good resource for this liturgical catechesis is *The Gift of Love: A Bride and Groom's Guide to Preparing the Wedding Liturgy* published by the *Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions or Together For Life* by Joseph M. Champlin

¹⁷ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, no. 17

¹⁸ Cf., *ibid.*, no. 29

published by *Ave Maria Press*. As was suggested by participants of the Town Hall Meetings, as part of this process, the couple could be guided through lectio divina based on the readings they choose.

The *Office of Marriage and Family Life* will publish and maintain a list of theological programs that satisfy the needs of proper theological training and will plan and host an on-going schedule of classes and trainings in life skills for the parishes to send couples.

Purification and Synthesis

The new standards include a time of final preparation for the couple to reflect on what they've learned, to root it more deeply in their hearts, and engage in spiritual preparation for the Rite of Matrimony.

In the Catechumenate, the period of Purification and Enlightenment immediately precedes the celebration of the sacraments and is a time of spiritual recollection, more intense spiritual preparation, and a time to synthesize all that has been learned on the journey. Leaving room for pastoral discernment and the needs of each couple in accompanying them toward the sacrament, suggestions for this phase of the catechumenate would include:

- Inviting the couple to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a way of readying their souls
- Taking on some sort of additional prayer and fasting
- Making available Prayer Reflections or devotionals
- Praying together as a couple
- Memorizing vows
- Inviting Jesus into their marriage
- **Using the *Blessing for Engaged Couples* from the *Order of Matrimony***

If parishes wished to hold a retreat or prayer service to satisfy this portion, several parishes could join together so couples could experience solidarity with one another in their preparation.

Mystagogy or Living Marriage

Taking cues from the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, a period of mystagogy for the marriage catechumenate will focus on deepening the understanding and experience of the sacramental life as well as a further drawing into the life of the community. Because of this, the mystagogy should entail three pillars: a continuation of the mentor relationship as friendship, inclusion in small groups, and continuing formation in the family as Domestic Church as well as the life skills of marriage.

Since “Living Marriage” takes place after the wedding day, it will sometimes be difficult to get certain couples to participate. However, communicating the expectation from the beginning of the process, like is done in RCIA, will go a long way in getting couples to participate. At almost every Town Hall session, participants emphasized continuing the mentoring relationship as key to on-going formation and accompaniment. Mentors can be indispensable at helping the parish invite the newly married to events and programs geared toward young couples and families. The mentors can continue their role as “bridges of trust” between the parish and the couple and the parish should communicate with the mentors in addition to the couple when notifying them about certain events offered in the parish.



Drawing the couple into wider communities such as the *Christian Family Movement*, and other types of small groups for accompaniment and apprenticeship are crucial so the newly married couple may benefit from the life experiences of a wider array of individuals and couples. Participation in the community has always been a key element of discipleship and a couple with a strong community life will also have more resources to navigate the difficulties of married life.

During the town hall meetings, a very common suggestion was inviting the couple to attend the *Couple Prayer Series* and hosting events for newly marrieds to meet other young couples and families. Aiding the couple in building relationships within the parish and providing retreats, date nights, programming like *Living in Love*, *Choice Wine*, *CatholicEnrichment.com*, or Theology of the Body will enable the couple to continue their maturation as spouses and give them the support they need as they begin to welcome children and face the challenges of life. Programming, such as *A Lasting Promise for Married Couples*, *Alpha for Married Couples*, and others, can help couples continue to hone their relationship skills. In addition, each parish should have information about Catholic counseling easily accessible.



Conclusion

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience and make it his own, if he does not participate fully within it.”¹⁹ It is within the family that men and women encounter this love and the New Evangelization is about calling men and women to re-encounter Christ and the promise he has for their lives. Because we all have our foundation in a family, the family must be a primary location for the efforts of the New Evangelization. As St. John Paul II said, “the family is the way of the church”²⁰ and we have been tasked with helping men and women more faithfully enter onto that way. Let us go boldly working to build up these communities of life and love. In the words of Bishop Boyea from his pastoral letter:

I am somewhat fearful of all this, wondering about all the work involved, and nervous that we should somehow not achieve great things for the glory of God. Yet, this is a reminder to me that all we can do is sow the seed and allow God to work his will. On the other hand, I am also excited to lead us on this adventure of faith. I almost feel like St. Paul as he faced the vision of the Macedonian (near present-day Istanbul) inviting him to cross over from Asia to the European continent (Acts 16:9), or like St. Columba in the 560s as he stared at Scotland to the east from his island of Iona and pondered the conversion of the Picts, or like Blessed Junipero Serra in the 1700s as he sought to share the Gospel with the Native Americans of present-day California. Perhaps they, too, experienced some trepidation as they faced their mission. We, however, like those who have gone before us, are full of the confidence that God will achieve what our weak efforts cannot – his glory and our salvation. “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).²¹



¹⁹ St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10.

²⁰ *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 2.

²¹ *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*, no. 67.



Appendix A

Life Skills Programs

A Lasting Promise

Alpha for Marriage Prep

<https://alphausa.org/the-marriage-preparation-course/>

Chapters/Topics covered:

1. Family of Origin: They discuss the changing of loyalties from parents to spouse, as well as how to continue respecting the place parents have in a person's new life. Issues like showing gratitude, staying in touch, etc. are dealt with
2. Communication Skills: They spend quite a bit of time going over communication. How to resolve conflict, when and where to engage in a disagreement, the steps to have a healthy disagreement, etc. They also speak quite a bit about communication and sex.
3. Past Relationships: In the section on sex they speak about the need to communicate about past relationships, to leave them behind, and to get counseling if necessary.
4. Cohabitation: They do a good job of addressing the issue and advising completely against it.
5. Addictions (Alcohol/Drugs/Gambling): Not covered.
6. Addictions (Pornography & Sexual): They spoke a bit about the negative effects of pornography use on a marriage but didn't go into many details.
7. Abuse: They mentioned in several places the need to be sensitive to these issues and to seek counseling if necessary.
8. Forgiveness: Forgiveness is a major component of their communication strategy as well as seeking forgiveness from God. However, since this is a protestant program there is nothing on confession.

9. Theology of the Body: Not covered since it a protestant program and more of a life skills program and not a theological program
10. Intimacy and Sexuality: They have some really great and very valuable things to say here. I was impressed with much of it. They don't have the theological strength a catholic program would have, but they deal with many issues pertaining to sexuality and the need for communication, respect, love, and generosity.
11. Finances: They bring up finances during the section on resolving conflict and much of what they talk about is good from a communications stand point. I don't think they are as strong as they could be on finances end.
12. Faith-Practice: Emphasized the need for daily prayer and prayer together.
13. Faith-Traditions: I don't think they mentioned this much outside the prayer conversion.
14. Family Planning: Very lightly dealt with. Basic advice is to communicate about it, give yourself some space as a couple before jumping in and educate yourself about methods. I believe it could be confusing for a Catholic audience.
15. Extended Family: Most of family of origin issues surrounded shifting family dynamics and how to respect one's parents in this new relationship/situation.
16. Friends and Interests: They make good points about the marriage being the priority and that friendships need to be redefined.
17. Parenting: Mention that children are a great good of marriage but don't really talk about parenting all that much.

Strengths:

Is very strong in practical's and dealing with life skills. With the right facilitator this program could work well.

Weaknesses:

Weaknesses come from the fact that it is a protestant program and so it is confusing for a Catholic audience on family planning and doesn't have anything close to a Theology of the Body aspect.

Financial Peace University – Dave Ramsey

<https://www.daveramsey.com>

Chapters/Topics covered:

Financial Peace University is a nine-lesson, money-management class taught by Dave Ramsey. Dave and his teaching team walk through the basics of budgeting, dumping debt, planning for the future, and much more. This can be done with a local group or on-line.

It covers topics related to Communication, Family of Origin, parenting, and forgiveness (as they relate to debt and spending).

Strengths:

1. Faith-based program – is very centered around faith-based concepts and while not Catholic, presents nothing contrary to Catholic teaching.
2. Encourages couple to both be actively involved in the budgeting and spending decisions, strengthening communication between the couple.
3. Provides clear guidelines for reducing debt, building a budget and allocating revenue.
4. The program encourages tithing of first fruits.
5. Website has many tools to use in preparing and maintaining a budget and debt reduction plan.
6. Once implemented, it provides a framework for financial success for the long-term, reducing finance related stress within the couple relationship.

Weakness:

1. Program has to be led by a trained Financial Peace representative or done independently online.
2. It is a 12-week program (when done in a group environment), which may prove difficult to commit to for some couples.

Other Comments: A very effective and proven tool to provide financial

Remarriage Programs

Smart Steps for Stepfamilies Program -

<https://shop.familylife.com/Products.aspx?categoryID=171>

Chapters/Topics covered: (taken from webpage)

Product Description

When stepfamily life gets tough, remaining dedicated to your commitment is a day-to-day decision.

Ron L. Deal, director of Family Life Blended and one of the nation's leading experts on Christian stepfamilies, gives couples keys to building a healthy stepfamily. The eight sessions--ideal for small groups or seminars--offer useable solutions for everyday living, practical tips for raising step kids, and ways to strengthen the couple's marriage. Deal's personable presentation combines instruction and encouragement that affirms both husbands and wives and their intent to build strong families. The video presentation supports Deal's popular book *The Smart Stepfamily*. Along with the DVDs, a Participant Guide is available here. Topics covered are:

- Stepfamily myths
- Realistic expectations for adults and children
- Stages of stepfamily development
- Legal issues
- Finances
- Defining roles and rules
- Developing empathy
- Understanding child development
- Stepparent-stepchild relationships
- Communication with your child's other parent
- Building respectful and caring relationships

Strengths:

- Current program already used and vetted by the Lansing Diocese
- View of the writers while not Catholic has a very Christian focus which we feel is important.
- Information is practical and provides excellent detail as to the 'whys'.
- Books contain a website with a wide variety of topics for reference and resources.
- Co-parenting – Understanding importance of parenting as a team
- Addresses not only young children but blended families with adult children
- Dynamics of stepfamily life and development; importance of making intentional decision about emotional, psychological and spiritual growth as a couple and family
- Addresses hidden challenges of a step-family
- Importance of understanding the reality of step-family vs nuclear family

Weakness:

- Basically, any area that requires more in-depth discussion are contained within the other marriage-prep programs.
- Cohabitation is not covered under this program, but is within the overall program requirements

Other Comments: This program is not specifically designed as a marriage prep tool but to be used for step family/remarriage enrichment. Using "The Smart Stepfamily" program within the framework of the pre-marriage requirements, enhances the readiness of a remarrying couple.



Appendix B

Catechetical Programs

Fully Engaged

<http://www.getfullyengaged.com>

Chapters/Topics covered:

Family of Origin, Communication (including conflict resolution), Intimacy (including past relationships and cohabitation and contraception), Second Marriages (including problems from previous marriages), Blended Families, Catholic Identity (NFP mentioned), Infertility and Adoption, Finances, Ecumenical Marriage, Catholic Parenting

Strengths:

1. INVENTORY-DRIVEN, i.e., an inventory (on-line and pen/paper options) is built into the program, which means no need to purchase a separate inventory program.
2. Very Catholic (the developers once told us they designed it specifically with a Catholic orientation, as opposed to being suited to the general populace) and catechetical, i.e., Church teaching appears throughout. “What the Church Has to Say” paragraphs provide quotations from Church documents.
3. Includes strong sections on Infertility and Adoption (which we’ve not seen addressed in this depth in other programs)
4. Section on The Sacrament of Marriage makes some good points regarding unity.
5. Lay couples can lead the program, once trained.
6. On-line resources available

Weaknesses:

1. A failure/deficiency we think inhabits all inventory-driven programs is that while mentors guide the engaged couple through each question and issues are identified and discussed, experiential skills are not taught.

Preparing to Live in Love

<http://livinginlove.org/our-programs/preparing-to-live-in-love/>

Chapters/Topics covered:

1. Family of Origin: Focuses on both indirect and direct formation. Speaks of the need for each partner to understand what they are bringing into the marriage based on their experience. It encourages them to make intentional decisions together rather than relying on defaults. Has a good perspective on the uniqueness of each married couple. We have had some very significant “ah ha” moments with couples as they come to understand themselves in this light.
2. Communication Skills: Excellent in its approach of understanding that we can think the same but not feel the same. Helps to give excellent, solid, structural approach to solving problems and making solid decisions about serious matters. Encourages active involvement towards the others feelings which feeds the experience of unconditional acceptance.
3. Past Relationships: Encourages couples to get healing for their past relationships, but not a lot of time spent talking about it in the sessions. Gives a bit of time to impact on intimate relationship with new spouse.
4. Cohabitation: Gives factual statistics to support the argument for how it handicaps a relationship. It likens it to taking a vaccine against the real thing; i.e., you take just enough to make you immune to it. Great analogy! Also discusses the “out” clause that exists between the two of you--anytime you feel like it, you can just walk out.
5. Addictions: It is hit hard in a homework exercise for the couple in terms of these things being true impediments to being able to love with a free will. They speak of the need for professional treatment and victory before moving on to marriage in any of these instances.
6. Abuse: It is briefly mentioned in terms of not manipulating one another's emotions.
7. Forgiveness: There is a whole beautiful session on forgiveness, both for forgiving each other and those outside their marriage--excellent! Gives the couple a good understanding of how when we are hurt by others, we tend to take it out on those nearest us. When one of us is injured, we are both injured.

8. Theology of the Body: The Theology of the Body is a central theme woven throughout the whole fabric of the program. It is literally “in” the soup. There are quotes from Pope St. John Paul II sprinkled in every session!
9. Intimacy and Sexuality: Again, there is an entire session devoted to this topic from a beautiful perspective of bringing God into the bedroom, raising the bar beyond what we, even in good Christian homes, are raised to believe is possible. Smart Loving is a great tool given. This program effectively takes back the area of our God-given sexuality, which has been hijacked by the world, the flesh and the devil.
10. Faith-Practice: This is an integral part of the program as a whole session is devoted to the Sacrament of Matrimony. Couples are encouraged to pray together (as a way of growing in spiritual intimacy) and dialogue on each of their faith experiences and practices. While the program as a whole is very Catholic in its approach, a good exercise is given to interfaith couples.
11. Family Planning: Good emphasis on NFP and a positive presentation of it with valuable statistics. Mentor couples are encouraged to tell their “family” story, which adds to the personal nature and shows the couple that God’s plans are not always our plans and vice versa.
12. Extended Family: Excellent practice of love of benevolence for extended family members taught, touching on expectations from both sides. Addresses the transition of the need for intimacy going from family of origin to your spouse.
13. Friends and Interests: Some discussion of the need for involvement in one another’s interests and friendships.
14. Parenting: Couples are challenged to look at how they were raised in their family of origin and relationships with mom and dad and how they were impacted by them/their parenting, which would then in turn open dialogue about how they would like to parent.

Strengths:

1. Presents sexuality of marriage within a sacramentality context; addresses intimacy on 3 levels (physical, emotional, spiritual); we've not found another program that does it as well (and certainly not within a 7-week time frame).
2. Designed for the pre-evangelized, i.e., assumes nothing. PLL evangelizes, catechizes and teaches the faith in small bites, using a "matrimony lens."
3. Available in several formats...one-on-one mentoring (Preparing to Live in Love-7 sessions) and within a group setting (Beginning to Live in Love-7 sessions); outlines available online to present material in fewer but longer sessions
4. Lay mentor couples lead the program--following mentor training provided by local trainers.
5. No program can do it all (in 7 weeks), but like all good programs, PLL touches on most of the categories to the left within the context of its focus--intimacy and sacramentality, and treats most in-depth.
6. Lots of online resources

Weakness:

1. Requires outside inventory.

Joy Filled Marriage

<https://ascensionpress.com/shop/t/category/study-programs/joy-filled-marriage>

Chapters/Topics covered:

1. Family of Origin: Touched on briefly
2. Communication Skills: Addresses listening; resolving conflict
break-out activity encourages discussion of issues; extra exercises in appendix
3. Past Relationships: Briefly discussed within the context of the hurt that results from sexual "dishonesty"
4. Cohabitation: Short teaching

5. Addictions: Alcohol/drugs/gambling, touched on within context of temperance/balance; pornography/sexual addiction, covered within the context of “using” wife, and within context of sexual freedom, i.e., the addicted are not free
6. Abuse: Covered within context of sexual “honesty” and not “using” another
7. Forgiveness: Covered as part of resolving conflict; extra exercises in appendix
8. Intimacy and Sexuality: Covers fostering intimacy..all expressions, not just sexual, and is touched on as issue to be discussed
9. Finances: Discussion of finances within context of stewardship. There is a break-out activity within context of priorities. Also, there is a budget template and more on stewardship in appendix.
10. Faith-Practice: Touched on as a topic for the couple to address. Speaks to prayer, includes small section on interfaith marriages, with more teaching and exercises in the appendix. Covered more extensively in the “God’s Plan for Love” component.
11. Faith-Traditions: Touched on as a topic for the couple to address. Covered more extensively in the “God’s Plan for Love” component.
12. Family Planning: Good but short NFP teaching (for in-depth look, see sacramentality component (God’s Plan...)); expectation is that more teaching will be provided by NFP classes
13. Extended Family: Touched on as a topic for the couple to address.
14. Friends and Interests: Touched on within context of managing time, money, and energy.
15. Parenting: Touched on as a topic for the couple to address.

Strengths:

1. The program has 2 components, 6 sessions each: “God’s Plan for Love” (TOB and sacramentality), and “Life Skills for Couples” (life-skills within the context of virtues and TOB)
2. If a 12-session prep is more than time allows, the 6-week “Life Skills for Couples” component, which weaves TOB throughout, can serve as decent prep. For more TOB depth, the “God’s Plan for Love” component can be added.

3. Designed to work in several formats: large group, small group, one-on-one mentoring
4. Lay couples can lead the program with the help of a 20-30 minute DVD/streaming video for each session. Sample videos (on-line) seem very well done, teaching is solid.
5. No program can do it all in the space of 6 (or even 12) weeks, but like all good programs Joy-Filled touches on most of the relevant categories/topics within the context of its focus--TOB, virtue, and sacramentality.
6. Free on-line resources--5 mini-training-videos (3-4 minutes each) assume the 20-30 minute DVD/streaming video for each session will be the main source of teaching, plus other downloadable leader resources.

Weakness:

1. Requires outside inventory

Additional Comments: RECENTLY REVISED TO INCLUDE ON-LINE COMPONENTS (The review of “Chapters/Topics covered” above is based on a working knowledge of the original version of the Joy-Filled program, to which a review of on-line information regarding the revised version has been added. Note that the 2-day training seminar required before leading the original version appears to have been replaced with the on-line resources.)

Beloved (Augustine Institute)

<https://www.augustineinstitute.org/formed/beloved/>

Chapters/Topics covered: (From Webpage)

Beloved is focused on catechesis and theology of marriage with group discussions focused on real life experiences. There are 6 stand-alone sessions cover specific topics on “Mystery and Meaning of Marriage”, and 6 stand-alone sessions on “Living Marriage”. Responses in these sessions helps in knowing readiness.



BELOVED 1 - MYSTERY & MEANING OF MARRIAGE (~45 MIN)

Session 1: Discussion about what marriage is and whether marriage really matters.

Session 2: Discussion on God's plan for marriage and how we participate in that plan.

Session 3: Discussion on how God reveals what love really is and how we are to exhibit that kind of love in our marriages.

Session 4: Looks at how love entails a total gift of self, in the daily relationship issues that come up in most marriages and in sexual intimacy.

Session 5: Looks at how a sacramental marriage forges a new kind of relationship between man and woman—how God becomes present to the couple in a new way and how a font of grace is available to help couples face whatever challenges may come and to love each other as Christ loves us.

Session 6: Wrap things up by considering the real challenges even the best of marriages face and how those challenges are opportunities for the couple to grow.

BELOVED 2 - LIVING MARRIAGE (18-25 MIN)

Session 1: Christ at the Center

Session 2: A deeper Unity

Session 3: Conflict and Communication


Session 4: Building a Thriving Marriage

Session 5: Protecting the Bond

Session 6: Sexuality and Authentic Love

Strengths:

1. Strong on theology of marriage – covers the sacrament of marriage
2. Provides a forum for good discussions between couples and within the couple
3. One nice effect of the program is couples getting to know other couples and the parish

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4. Allows for a parish-specific program
 5. Allows for married and engaged to be involved in the programs and interact – topics are timely/good for both.
 6. Flexibility on how it is offered – timing and sizing

Weakness:

1. Not as strong on the practical skills – would likely need supplement
2. Some of the talks are not as strong as others – especially true for those in the Beloved 2 – Living Marriage.

Other Comments: Can be supplemented with other Formed material or even material from other programs.

Appendix C

Report Following the 2017 Diocese of Lansing Marriage Preparation Town Hall Meetings

Before the Marriage Advisory Committee began their work of recommending certain updates to the Pre-Nuptial Catechesis requirements in the Diocese of Lansing, a series of town hall meetings were called to gather input from those who work with engaged couples all across the diocese. The meetings were held in April and May at St. Gerard in Lansing, Holy Family in Grand Blanc, St. Joseph in Howell, St. Joseph in Dexter, and Queen of the Miraculous Medal in Jackson. Those who attended were priests, deacons, marriage prep coordinators, FOCCUS facilitators, NFP teachers, licensed marriage counselors, and family life ministers. In total 125 individuals attended the sessions and gave their input. Those who attended were asked to consider a preparation for marriage which would imitate the catechumenate, a model which would fulfill the vision of the 1977 Synod of Bishops, Popes St. John Paul II and Francis, and finally Bishop Boyea in the document *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*.

The following report seeks to summarize the input gathered from these meetings. Each section will correspond to the sections the table groups worked on and will begin with the description they were given.

General ideas that came out of several meetings, not specifically tied to the pillars of a Marriage Catechumenate:

- listing the time of preparation as a spectrum of options (ex. 9-18 months). This would allow for pastoral discernment of how long a couple needs to prepare, but also might prevent a couple from contacting the parish at the bare minimum of time required; rather than a couple having been engaged for 18 months and have all their dates set and then contacting the parish with 9 months to go.

- Creating a program of spiritual and catechetical formation for FOCCUS Couples.
- Facilitating the networking of parishes to share resources and schedules.
- Asking too much could drive them away.
- Including a “Faith Inventory” before the couple inventory.
- Develop an “Advanced” Marriage Track for couples wanting to “go the extra mile”
- Update the M-A Form to be more pastoral in its language

Evangelization

A time when the Gospel is faithfully and consistently proclaimed. Those responsible for formation are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel and help them to cooperate with God's grace. Opportunities should be provided for them to meet families and other groups of Christians. Cf. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults no. 36-38

For the section on evangelization, several themes were common throughout the meetings. Encouraging the couple to pray together and read scripture, discussion of the sacramental nature of Marriage and the role God wants to have in their relationship, the value of witnessing Christian marriage by mentor couples, and creating avenues (such as social events) for couples to encounter the parish life outside of Mass were commonly discussed. One group emphasized the need for any evangelization component to be authentic, real, and relatable. Some additional ideas which were offered:

- Helping couples to understand the priorities in their lives (God, their relationship, Family, other)
- Including marriage prep in the parish evangelization plan
- Having engaged couples attend ALPHA or another encounter opportunity maybe a retreat with testimony from other couples, adoration of the Eucharist, etc.

- The couple should be received in a welcoming environment and the process should be explained as a means of helping them live a great marriage
- Exploring the meaning of covenant
- Welcome engaged couples at Sunday Mass or have them mentioned in the intentions
- Give them the vision so it doesn't feel like just jumping through hoops
- Better understanding of vocation
- Ask them to think about why they are here asking to be married in the Church
- Connect them to the community

Catechesis

Catechesis “is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.” It should be firmly grounded in the Word of God, and nurture a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ. No. 75-80

Again, many themes rose to the surface over the course of the many meetings. In this area, the topics broke down into two major categories: one that was more spiritual and the other more pragmatic. In the spiritual side of things, common themes were education in the theology of the body, communication of the Church's understanding of sexuality through teaching *Humanae Vitae* and Fertility Awareness (NFP), Couple prayer, and basic tenants of the faith using scripture, the catechism, or the creed as sources. Using the M-A form as a source for topics to be discussed was also an idea that came up a few times. When it came to more pragmatic areas, topics that were common included, communication/conflict resolution like the We CARE program, education in personal finances and joining the finances of two people, tithing, dealing with addictions (pornography, alcohol/drugs, gambling, etc.) Additional ideas included:

- Leaving the minimum prep time open so that parishes could discern if a couple needed more time to prepare
- Content should be standardized to facilitate parish sharing of resources
- Use the resources found on FORMED.org
- Catechesis on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Communication of the idea that the task of the spouses is to get each other to heaven
- Diocesan Marriage day or weekend retreat
- Imitate the RCIA process in that it takes time
- Catechesis on the sacrament
- Recommend podcasts to listen to on the Theology of the Body or Fr. John Riccardo
- How to get help when the problems arise
- Discuss parenting
- Love Languages
- The role of the father in the spiritual life of his children
- Explain Ephesians 5



Purification & Enlightenment

This period is meant to be a time of spiritual recollection, more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance. Cf. RCIA no. 138-140

For this section, clear themes of inviting the couple to the Sacrament of Confession, having them go on some sort of retreat, challenging them to not sleep together/move out if possible, and writing prayers or love letters were common. Other ideas included:

- Encouraging them to fast and abstain 1-2 weeks before the wedding to help prepare their hearts and focus on what God is doing in their lives.
- Encourage prayer as a couple and individually
- Attending Mass together and/or with their mentor couple
- Offering resources of reflections to read each day leading up to the wedding
- The couple could write their intercessions for the wedding liturgy
- Meeting with the pastor or other parish employee to reflect on and plan the liturgy
- Rosary
- Meditation on the crucifix as self gift
- Invite Jesus into their marriage
- Newly married couples could help with a retreat for engaged couples
- Grow in other areas of intimacy (SPICE)
- Examination of Conscience
- Memorizing vows
- Confession at Wedding Rehearsal
- Discussion about what sin is and what freedom from sin looks like
- Lectio Divina on the readings they chose

Mystagogy

This is a period of growing into a further understanding of the mysteries received in the sacraments and being more fully drawn into the community of disciples.

With the period of mystagogy, the possibilities were wide open since the concept in marriage prep is relatively new. Even so, a few common themes emerged. Continuing the relationship between mentor couple and newly married was mentioned at almost every session. Ideas for how this should be accomplished varied between monthly conversations to once every one hundred days after the wedding. Another common idea was organizing social opportunities for newly marrieds to meet other young couples and young families. Several other sessions brought up the idea of funneling the newly married into small groups like “Christian Family Movement” Other ideas:

- Couple prayer series
- Revisit the FOCCUS inventory
- Alpha for married couples
- Annual celebration of newly married
- Send a card to the couple on their anniversary
- Send out a CD or podcast
- 8 Great Dates
- We CARE on the one year anniversary
- Parish give them the gift of a crucifix
- Use technology to maintain contact
- Recruit them to serve
- Continue the friendships built during the engagement period
- Encourage them to become part of the marriage prep team
- Priest could visit the homes of newly weds
- Mass intention on their anniversary





Milestones

Key moments or markers of preparation. Analogous to the rites of acceptance and election in the RCIA process. Meant to give a directional feel to the process so the feeling of jumping through hoops is avoided.

Finally, in discussing what milestones could be included in the process, the most common themes which arose were bringing back the practice of publishing the marriage bans in the parish bulletin or other source when the couple is first beginning the process and secondly, a blessing of the engaged couple found in the new Rite of Celebrating Matrimony which could take place after the period of catechesis. Additional individual ideas included the following:

- Provide cards that include the names of the couple so that individual parishioners could pray for them and send letters of encouragement.
- Fertility awareness/NFP should take place early in the process
- Give them a copy of the vows or nuptial blessing at Mass at a ceremony of welcoming
- Write letters to describe why I want to marry this person - could be used as a homily help
- Have marriage during a regular Sunday Mass
- Introduce them to the congregation
- Have the couple trace the sign of the cross on each other's forehead and hands
- Retreat ½ day with prayer, fasting, and confession
- Betrothal Rite

Diocesan Marriage Advisory Committee

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- Richard Budd, Diocesan Director of Marriage and Family Life

Additional Consultation from the Diocesan Tribunal





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