



DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

# Resource Guide for Marriage Formation

July 26, 2017

## INTRODUCTION

The Marriage Formation Policy of the Diocese of Steubenville outlines the process for “immediate marriage preparation” (for engaged couples) to be followed in the diocese. Additionally, it highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to marriage formation, offering support throughout the lifecycle of the family. Given the essential role of the family in the Church and in society, and recognizing the challenges faced by the family, as well as the rejection of marriage by many people and the attempts to redefine marriage, there is urgent need to promote the beauty and dignity of marriage and to greatly expand the support given to families.

This guide offers a wide variety of printed and digital resources. It also contains a number of pastoral suggestions for priests, deacons and pastoral ministers for addressing various issues and for developing creative initiatives in support of the family.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This document will be updated periodically by the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life with the input of the Diocesan Marriage Commission.

## SECTION 1 – EDUCATIONAL AND FORMATIONAL RESOURCES

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### 1.1 Pre-Marital Inventories

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#### **FOCCUS**

Premarital inventory that covers major areas engaged couples should discuss. Offers research and training that Facilitate Open, Caring Communication, Understanding and Study. After taking the FOCCUS pre-marital inventory, couples meet with a trained facilitator. Available in Spanish, Chinese, and for couples with English as a second language.

Website: <http://www.foccusinc.com/>

Contact: [foccus@foccusinc.com](mailto:foccus@foccusinc.com), 877-883-5422

#### **Fully Engaged**

A Catholic catechetical pre-marriage inventory that carries a *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*. This comprehensive, catechetical tool forms engaged couples in the riches of the Church while equipping them with the essential skills necessary for a healthy marriage. This program utilizes a catechetical workbook for the engaged couple and contains a detailed Facilitator's Guide for the Facilitator. Follow up formation emails are sent to the Engaged Couple for one year after their marriage. Fully Engaged also contains a complete Convalidation Inventory for civilly married couples.

Website: <http://www.getfullyengaged.com/>

Contact: 800-624-9019.

#### **IPI Intercommunications Publishing**

IPI was the first to offer pre-marriage inventories beginning in 1980. We have programs available for various premarital situations, such as never-married couples, couples entering a second marriage, couples having their civil marriage convalidated, couples from different faith traditions, and more. Inventories are available both in hard-copy and online with English and Spanish options.

Website: <http://www.ipimn.com/>

Contact: 800-999-0680

#### **Prepare/Enrich**

An online relationship inventory and skill-building program based on a solid research foundation. Custom tailored to a couple's relationship and provides couple exercises to build their relationship skills. Can be used both for engaged and married couples. After taking the inventory, couples meet with a trained facilitator.

Website: <https://www.prepare-enrich.com/>

Contact: 800-331-1661

#### **Spirituality and Religion in Your Marriage: A Reflective Process for Engaged Couples**

by Dr. James Healy, Director of the Center for Family Ministry in the Diocese of Joliet

This booklet contains a short inventory that places the individual in one of four categories: 1) high in both Spirituality and Religion, 2) high in Spirituality and low in Religion, 3) low in both Religion and Spirituality, and 4) high in Religion and low in Spirituality. It affirms strengths and encourages growth in both the individual and the couple towards category number 1.

Website: <http://www.rootedinlove.org/Materials/Details/Spirituality>

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## 1.2 Comprehensive Marriage Preparation Programs

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### **For Better and For Ever**

A parish-based “sponsor couple” approach to marriage preparation. Married couples of the parish are trained to meet the engaged “where they are” as the starting point for dialogue about the vocation of Matrimony. The sponsor couple hosts a series of 4-6 meetings with the engaged couple in their own home, then after the wedding they follow-up with the newly married couple through the first year(s) of marriage. Available in Spanish, Vietnamese, and French.

Website: <http://marriagepreparation.com/>

Contact: [rob@marriagepreparation.com](mailto:rob@marriagepreparation.com), 210-534-1129

### **Joy-Filled Marriage**

The *Joy-Filled Marriage* is a comprehensive marriage preparation program rooted in virtues as well as the *Theology of the Body*. The program incorporates rich Catholic theology with sound psychology. Includes a virtue-based life skills component (“Living a Joy-Filled Marriage”) and a component focused on the Sacrament of Marriage and the Theology of the Body (“God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage”). Both components have Participant Books, Leader’s Guides and DVD’s, as well as other helpful resources. The two parts can be used separately (perhaps as a supplement to an existing marriage prep program) or together for a comprehensive and thorough preparation program. Published by Ascension Press.

Website: <http://joyfilledmarriage.com/>

Contact: [info@joyfilledmarriage.com](mailto:info@joyfilledmarriage.com), 800-376-0520

### **Preparing to Live in Love**

This parish-based program combines personal mentoring with a marriage preparation curriculum that integrates Theology of the Body and practical life skills. A mentor couple guides the engaged couple through the curriculum in a series of meetings in the mentors’ home. Provided by the Pennsylvania-based Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Center.

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

Contact: [pmrcusa@msn.com](mailto:pmrcusa@msn.com), 877-201-2142

### **Theology of the Body Marriage Preparation**

This marriage prep program, which Dr. Janet Smith calls a “real contribution to the need for truly useful marriage preparation materials,” gives poignant, refreshing insights into personal growth, communication skills, finances, catechesis, and more, all from the perspective of the Theology of the Body. The unique diagrams and charts—which Dr. Peter Kreeft lauds as “delightful” and “memorable”—flesh out St. John Paul II’s insights, make tough concepts accessible, and offer food-for-thought for discussions by couples. This complete program comes with a slide show presentation with facilitator’s notes and three downloadable files (Facilitator’s Guide, TOBET Tips for Presenting, and Addressing Tough Issues: A Theology of the Body Pastoral Response). TOB expert Monica Ashour can be brought in to train the trainers. Written by Monica Ashour, MTS, M Hum, and members of TOBET (Theology of the Body Evangelization Team). Available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Website: <http://www.tobet.org/>

Contact: Monica Ashour, [mashour@tobet.org](mailto:mashour@tobet.org) or 972-849-6543 (for content questions); [info@tobet.org](mailto:info@tobet.org) or 469-426-8355 (for order questions)

### **Transformed in Love: Building Your Catholic Marriage**

Written with consideration of current pastoral challenges in marriage preparation, this program provides a reflective, formational experience for couples through activities, practice exercises, and quotes from Scripture and Church documents. Leader and Team Manual available. Developed by clergy and laity in the Archdiocese of Boston; published by Pauline Books & Media.

Website: <http://www.transformedinlove.com/>

Contact: Mary Finnigan, [mary\\_finnigan@rcab.org](mailto:mary_finnigan@rcab.org) (for content questions); or [orderentry@paulinemediamedia.com](mailto:orderentry@paulinemediamedia.com), 800-876-4463 (for order questions)

### **Witness to Love**

*Witness to Love* is a tool for parishes that want to use the marriage prep process to benefit engaged couples by building a support system to accompany them before and after the wedding, integrating them into parish life, focusing on evangelization and getting the most out of the marriage prep process. This is not just a program but a system that will help enhance the current offerings that a parish, or diocese, already has in place and it is compatible with any PMI or marriage prep program listed on this page. Witness to Love was established in response to St. John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and operates under the guidance of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Online or live training for clergy or marriage prep personnel available.

Website: <http://www.witnesstolove.org/>

Contact: Mary-Rose Verret, [witnesstolove@gmail.com](mailto:witnesstolove@gmail.com)

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## **1.3 Online Marriage Preparation Programs and Other Resources**

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### **Agape Catholic Marriage Prep**

A division of Agape Catholic Ministries, dedicated to the building of strong Christ-centered marriages since 2004. Available anytime from anywhere. Based on Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The course requires a minimum of 20 hours of active work. It is usually completed in three to six weeks. Available in English, Spanish and French.

Website: <http://catholicmarriageprep.com/>

Contact: [info@catholicmarriageprep.com](mailto:info@catholicmarriageprep.com), 866-425-7193

Cost: \$175

### **Catholic Marriage Prep Class Online**

An online, on-demand preparation program based on videos from experts and married couples; interactive, convenient, and private. Available anytime from anywhere. Run by Marriage and Family Ministries in collaboration with the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Available in

Website: <http://catholicmarriageprepclass.com/>

Spanish Website: [www.preparacionmatrimonialcatolica.com](http://www.preparacionmatrimonialcatolica.com).

Contact: [info@catholicmarriageprepclass.com](mailto:info@catholicmarriageprepclass.com), 855-PRE-CANA (773-2262)

Cost: \$195

## **Marriage Boosters**

Engaged couples: you are invited to personalize your marriage preparation with videos that relate to your particular circumstance. Go to [marriageboosters.net](http://marriageboosters.net), register (no charge!), and you have access to videos that relate to your unique situation. Learn from other couples like you! Topics covered include the Unique Challenges of Military Families, Cohabitation, Forming a Stepfamily, Children of Divorce, Second Marriages, Interfaith and Interchurch Marriages, and Strengthening African–American Catholic Marriages. Developed by Marriage Ministries, a collaboration of the Archdiocese of Chicago and The Marriage Group.

Website: <http://marriageboosters.net/>

## **“Saying I Do: What Happens at a Catholic Wedding” – FREE online video**

Produced by the USCCB. Walks the viewer through the Rite of Marriage both within and outside of mass, and answers FAQs about Catholic weddings. Designed for engaged couples, both Catholic couples and those marrying a non-Catholic. (This video can be viewed on the website below.)

Website: <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/saying-i-do-what-happens-at-a-catholic-wedding/>

Contact: [marriage@usccb.org](mailto:marriage@usccb.org), 202-541-3013

## **“When Two Become One” - DVD**

Produced by the Diocese of Rockville Centre’s Office of Faith Formation. In this 25-minute DVD engaged couples learn about the sacrament of marriage, love, sexuality, natural family planning and more through the witness of four couples sharing their experiences, challenges and joys.

Website: <http://drvc-faith.mybigcommerce.com/when-two-become-one/>

Contact: 516-678-5800 ext. 223

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## **1.4 Resources For The Theology Of The Body<sup>2</sup>**

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### **An Introduction to the Theology of the Body (Online Videos)**

A short series of videos providing an introduction to the Theology of the Body will be available on the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life website. (See <http://www.diosteub.org/family>.)

Cost: None

### **Beloved: The Mystery and Meaning of Marriage (Online Course)**

In six sessions (approximately 4 hours), *Beloved* explores the true meaning of Marriage. Here you’ll discover the deepest spiritual, emotional, and practical realities of marriage through Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching. You’ll see firsthand how to experience the wonder, mystery, and joy of this sacrament—from that first “I do” through the rest of your lives.

Available on: <http://formed.org>

Cost: Individuals can access all of the video and audio content of Formed for \$9.99 per month; workbooks are available for additional purchase for those interested.

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<sup>2</sup> Some marriage preparation programs include a comprehensive introduction to the *Theology of the Body*, such as *God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage*, *Agape Catholic Marriage Prep*, and *Theology of the Body Marriage Preparation Program*.

Note: Parishes can subscribe to Formed for everyone in their parish for \$159.99 per month; couples attending a subscribing parish would not need to subscribe separately. Digital copies of workbooks and handouts are available for free with a parish subscription.

**Beloved: The Mystery and Meaning of Marriage (Home Edition DVD)**

In six sessions (approximately 4 hours), *Beloved* explores the true meaning of Marriage. Here you'll discover the deepest spiritual, emotional, and practical realities of marriage through Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching. You'll see firsthand how to experience the wonder, mystery, and joy of this sacrament—from that first “I do” through the rest of your lives. It includes the DVD and two Couple's Guides for marriage enrichment.

Website: <https://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/beloved-home-edition-dvd-set>

Cost: \$59

**Theology of the Body - Online Course (taught by Christopher West)**

An Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering the Master Plan for Your Life, is an eight-part, four-hour study designed to give you a solid understanding of God's plan for humanity—a plan stamped right into our bodies.

Website: <https://store.mycatholicfaithdelivered.com/p-553-theology-of-the-body.aspx>

Cost: \$49.00

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**1.5 General Resources for Natural Family Planning**

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According to the *Diocese of Steubenville Marriage Formation Policy*, each couple must attend a diocesan-approved course in natural family planning (NFP). Various methods of training are available in the Diocese, although not all are available in each region. Most courses require at least 3 classes over the course of three months. Refer to the website of the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life for contact information and class schedules.

The following information, from the USCCB, is provided simply to equip priests and pastoral ministers to answer common questions or objections they might encounter.

**What is Natural Family Planning?**

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the general title for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone pregnancies. NFP methods are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy. Since the methods of NFP respect the love-giving (unitive) and life-giving (procreative) nature of the conjugal act, they support God's design for married love!

Answers to the following questions can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp/>

- Is NFP based on guess-work?
- Who can use NFP?
- What are the methods of NFP?
- What are the signs of fertility?

- How does NFP work?
- What are the benefits of using NFP?
- How effective are NFP methods for avoiding pregnancy?

### **Responding to Common Myths**

There are several common misconceptions regarding the principles and practice of Natural Family Planning. Research-based responses to the following myths can be found by visiting this page: <http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp/frequently-asked-questions.cfm>

- Myth #1: NFP is based on guesswork: it's what people used before modern science developed contraception [i.e., the rhythm method].
- Myth #2: NFP can be used only by women with regular cycles.
- Myth #3: NFP is too complicated to be used by most people.
- Myth #4: NFP is not a reliable method of family planning.
- Myth #5: There is no difference between NFP and contraception.
- Myth #6: NFP does not allow for sexual spontaneity.
- Myth #7: Couples who use NFP have sex less often than couples who use contraception.
- Myth #8: The Catholic Church wants people to have as many babies as possible.
- Myth #9: The Catholic Church does not want married couples to have sex just for pleasure.

## SECTION 2 – PLANNING RESOURCES

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### 2.1 *Workbooks For Couples*

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#### **A Marriage in the Lord, 6<sup>th</sup> edition**

This Catholic marriage preparation workbook helps couples to prepare for a lifelong happy, healthy, and holy marriage. Bulk discounts available. Provided by the Marriage and Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Website: [http://www.familyministries.org/store/catalog.asp?item=72&category\\_id=8](http://www.familyministries.org/store/catalog.asp?item=72&category_id=8)

Contact: Frank Hannigan, [fhannigan@archchicago.org](mailto:fhannigan@archchicago.org), 312-534-8351

#### **The Mission of Love: A Sacramental Journey to Marital Success**

Written by John Curtis, Fr. Dominic McManus, O.P., and Mike Day, this is focused on helping engaged couples embrace their mission and vocation in the Sacrament of Marriage. Book format and Couple's Guidebook with exercises. Available in Kindle version.

Website: <http://themissionoflove.org/>

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### 2.2 *Liturgical Resources*

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#### **A Catholic Bride's Wedding Planner**

by Tracy Becker

Practical tool for Catholic brides (and grooms). Includes reflections on engagement and the Sacrament of Marriage, steps for getting married in the Catholic Church, a calendar with stickers to mark important moments leading up to the wedding, and an organizational section for wedding vendor contact information.

Website: [https://www.guardianangelstore.com/product\\_info-40+10500.html#.WSjGdWj1DIW](https://www.guardianangelstore.com/product_info-40+10500.html#.WSjGdWj1DIW)

#### **Catholic Wedding Help**

A step-by-step guide to planning a Catholic wedding, including Scripture readings, the vows, various parts of the wedding liturgy, and information about Catholic marriage. Provided by Our Sunday Visitor.

Website: <http://www.catholicweddinghelp.com/>

#### **Together for Life: Celebrating & Living the Sacrament,**

by Joseph M. Champlin, with Peter A. Jarret, C.S.C.

With more than nine million copies sold, *Together for Life* provides all of the tools engaged couples and their ministers need to plan for the liturgical celebration of their wedding – prayers, Bible readings, vows, and sample intercessions. *Together for Life* also includes catechetical commentary to help couples deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The fifth edition includes all approved liturgical texts for planning weddings during Mass, outside Mass, or between a Catholic and an unbaptized person. The text is supported by [Together for Life Online](#), which helps couples through their engagement, the first years of their marriage, and beyond. Also available in Spanish.

Website: [https://www.avemariapress.com/product/1-59471-282-4/Together-for-Life/#description\\_tab](https://www.avemariapress.com/product/1-59471-282-4/Together-for-Life/#description_tab)

Contact: Ave Maria Press, 800-282-1865

## SECTIONS 3 – PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

A successful marriage requires that a couple is mature, responsible, and free to marry. There is no single, objective standard by which one can either judge a couple's readiness to marry, or guarantee their success. However, specific, identifiable circumstances may be present which indicate a need for further assessment and growth before the final decision is made to proceed with the marriage.

Some impediments (such as the impediment of Disparity of Cult for a Catholic to marry a non-baptized person or someone whose baptism is doubtful) are resolved simply by obtaining the proper dispensation from the local ordinary. Other impediments (such as a previous marriage), can take months to resolve. *In all cases of special circumstance, increased pastoral care is warranted, so that the marriage can be as strong as possible.*

For clarification regarding proceeding with the preparation for marriage of couples presenting unusual or complicated circumstances/impediments, contact the Office of Church Law at the Chancery.

*The following is a partial list of special circumstances that may characterize couples presenting themselves to be married in the Church:*

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### **3.1 Issues Impacting the Decision to Marry**

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If one or both individuals demonstrate serious readiness issues, the priest or deacon should consider referring one or both parties to a professional for assessment and treatment while addressing less serious readiness issues through his pastoral work. The professional's role is to advise the couple and the priest or deacon, not to make a final decision on whether or not the marriage should be delayed. The burden of that decision rests solely with Church authority.

#### **Abuse**

Issues involving abuse of any kind warrant serious attention, with the safety of the abused party being the highest priority. Even bringing up the subject in the presence of both partners puts the abused party at risk. In addition, it is not uncommon for a one-on-one conversation with either/both party(ies) to result in the denial of its presence in the relationship. Once safety is assured, therapy can be helpful. Ministers should exercise care in referring a competent therapist.

#### **Addiction**

Issues involving addiction of any kind (i.e. alcohol, drugs, gambling, Internet, pornography, etc.) demand professional attention. Treatment can involve individual, couple, and/or group therapy, as well as support groups. Twelve-step programs can be effective, and are widely available.

#### **Age**

The preparation process should be age appropriate. Special attention should be given to the preparation of couples in which even one of them is younger than the age of 21. Many couples just past their teenaged years are not ready to take on the commitment and responsibilities of

marriage, and would likewise benefit from similar extra pastoral attention. Discussion facilitated by a premarital inventory can help these couples recognize a need for more time before entering a lifelong relationship.

Concerns about age can also apply to older couples. Despite the tendency to believe they need less preparation because of their presumed maturity and experience, there are many special issues unique to older couples that merit discussion, such as previous relationships (especially for the divorced or widowed); finances; transition from a single lifestyle to a marriage partnership; and obligations to family members.

### **Faith Issues: Interfaith or Interreligious Marriages**

Couples are urged to learn about their future spouse's faith – not for the purpose of conversion, but for understanding, mutual respect, and family harmony. Despite the complexity of combinations of Catholic partner and the profession/lack of profession of faith of the other partner, canon law and liturgical rites are specific about what dispensations and rites are needed. In an interreligious marriage, the Catholic partner must make the following promise to be faithful to the Catholic Church and raise his or her children in the Catholic faith (Canon 1125):

*"I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ, and with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics."*<sup>3</sup>

The non-Catholic partner is to be informed of the promise, so that he or she is aware of the promise and obligation the Catholic partner has made. It is not necessary for the non-Catholic partner to make a promise or sign a statement.

### **Faith Issues: Non-practicing Catholic(s)**

While some evidence of faith is required for the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the *level* of faith is not the question. Engaged couples must be accepted and instructed at their actual level. "As for wishing to lay down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage, criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married, this would above all involve grave risks. The faith of the person seeking marriage in the Church can exist in varying degrees. It is the primary duty of pastors to facilitate a rediscovery of this faith, nourishing it and bringing it to maturity."<sup>4</sup>

### **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy should always be treated as a caution to marriage as opposed to a reason to rush into it, because this can interfere with a person's ability to give free consent. If the couple's first consideration of marriage followed discovery of the pregnancy, the possibility of pressure to marry needs to be carefully explored. However, "in light of our Church's consistent witness to the sanctity of human life, the couple's choice to embrace the pregnancy should be affirmed by the pastoral minister."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Diocese of Steubenville Marriage Assessment Form.

<sup>4</sup> *Familiaris Consortio*, 68.

<sup>5</sup> *Pastoral Policies and Guidelines for Marriage Preparation for the Catholic Church in New Jersey*, Dioceses of New Jersey, 2008.

### **Preparing Couples for Convalidations**

Pastoral discernment is necessary to determine the formational needs of couples seeking convalidations. Some couples may greatly benefit by participating in some aspects of the marriage preparation process, provided that care is demonstrated for issues unique to their situation.

If the couple has been married civilly two years or less, they should be encouraged to participate in the marriage preparation program. If the couple has been married more than two years, they should be encouraged to participate in some type of marriage enrichment activity – either a formal event (e.g., World Wide Marriage Encounter) or an informal activity (e.g., reading *For Better...FOREVER! A Catholic Guide to Lifelong Marriage*<sup>6</sup>). Some couples may appreciate completing a premarital inventory to help them identify and address areas where growth may be needed.

### **Remarriage**

The first step in preparing for remarriage is to determine the couple's freedom to marry. "If one or both of the parties is not free to marry by reason of a prior marital bond, a date cannot be set (not even a tentative one) until the prior attempted marriage is declared null and the party (parties) declared free to marry."<sup>7</sup>

It is wise to urge an appropriately long period of engagement in order to discourage couples from marrying "on the rebound" or without having understood responsibility for and/or contribution to the difficulties of the previous marriage. Furthermore, special attention is warranted to help the couple understand how the dynamics of a previous marriage will impact their new marriage. In addition to typical issues, marriage ministers should also address resolution of grief from the previous relationship(s), blending families, step-parenting, establishing of new family traditions, etc.

The form of marriage preparation can be adapted to the age and circumstances of the couple, but abbreviating preparation for couples who had happy marriages before the death of a spouse is not advisable. Mentor couples can help the engaged couple discern where they are in the grief process, and how they will deal with issues such as merged finances and obligations to children from the previous marriage.

### **Validation of an invalid marriage**

Validation occurs in instances in which an invalid marriage is validated in accordance with the canons of the Church. Invalidity often occurs when one or both parties is Catholic, and they failed to have their vows received by a Catholic priest or deacon (such as being married by a non-Catholic minister or before a civil authority without proper dispensation). There are two paths that can be followed to validate an invalid marriage: convalidation and radical *sanation*. A convalidation is a new exchange of the marriage vows before a priest or deacon, and requires a whole new act of will on the part of the couple. Radical *sanation* renders retroactively valid a marriage that was invalid from its origin without the renewal of consent by either party, provided that both the man and woman were free to marry at that time and that their mutual consent

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<sup>6</sup> Available from the Pastoral Solutions Institute, online at <https://www.catholiccounselors.com/product/better-forever-catholic-guide-lifelong-marriage/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Diocese of Steubenville Marriage Formation Policy*, Appendix B - *Liturgical/Canonical Considerations*.

continues from the invalid wedding ceremony. Priests and deacons may contact the Office of Church Law at the Chancery if they are in need of additional guidance.

### **Children from this or a previous marriage**

Children from a current or previous relationship are in and of themselves neither a reason to marry nor to refrain from marrying. Of primary concern is that the parent recognizes his or her responsibility to support children from a previous relationship financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Because of the strain on the couple and the children, special counseling is especially important, including remarriage preparation if appropriate.

### ***Print and Internet Resources for Remarriage***

#### **Remarriage In The Catholic Church: A Couple's Guide**

Authors Joseph and Linda Sclafani work in remarriage ministry with the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Fla. This book reflects their years of experience in that field and resulted from their diocesan remarriage preparation program. The book is a suitable, hands-on resource for a parish or diocesan remarriage process. A couple might pick it up on their own before or after the wedding.

Website: <http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/reincach.html>

Contact: 800-321-0411

#### **Catholic Remarriage: A Workbook for Couples**

Anthony Garascia, a marriage counselor, pastoral minister, and author of *Before "I Do"* the best-selling marriage preparation resource, presents *Catholic Remarriage*. This is a workbook for couples preparing for remarriage or seeking convalidation in the Catholic Church. (A leader's guide is available for pastoral ministers.) Together with their pastoral minister, the couple learns to address unresolved issues from the previous marriage(s), assess the health of the new relationship, identify potential problem areas, and work to resolve any specific concerns before moving ahead to a new sacramental marriage.

Website: <https://www.avemariapress.com/product/1-59471-038-4/Catholic-Remarriage/>

Contact: (800) 282-1865

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## **3.3 Moral Issues**

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### **Abortion**

Abortion is a highly traumatic experience, for both women and men. Should the acknowledgment of an abortion during the current or a prior relationship be made during marriage preparation, take the opportunity to pastorally demonstrate how the Church is loving and forgiving by reaching out with concern and utmost sensitivity. The issue can be a complicated one – rape or incest or other form of coercion might have been involved – hence great care should always be used in extending Christ-like compassion.

Feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, and panic are common for someone who has experienced an abortion, or who has encouraged or coerced a partner to do so. There may also be additional layers of guilt and/or regret if the mother made and acted on the decision without consulting the father, or if she proceeded against the father's wishes. In addition, every relationship can be

gravely impacted: besides the baby's father, grandparents, extended family members, and the parents' friends can also suffer. The pain of abortion may be intensified by a sense of alienation from God and the Church. It is possible that shame may cause the parent(s) to keep the matter to him/herself, even for many years.

Invite the woman who has been involved in an abortion to participate in a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat or other post-abortion healing ministry. Generally, these processes include counseling, prayer, and Scripture reflection. At the appropriate time in the healing process, invite reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an experience of God's forgiveness and grace. (Information about local Rachel's Vineyard retreats can be found at <http://rachelsvineyard.org>.)

## **Cohabitation**

Although cohabitation has become increasingly commonplace, it raises serious pastoral concerns. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has articulated the problem well:

“Today many couples are living together in a sexual relationship without the benefit of marriage. Many cohabiting couples believe that their desire for each other justifies the sexual relationship. This belief reflects a misunderstanding of the natural purpose of human sexual intercourse, which can only be realized in the permanent commitment of marriage... Couples offer various reasons for cohabiting, ranging from economics to convenience. Frequently, they have accepted the widespread societal belief that premarital cohabitation is a prudent way to determine whether they are truly compatible. They believe they need a trial period before proceeding to the lifelong commitment of marriage. Social science research, however, finds that cohabitation has no positive effects on a marriage. In some cases, cohabitation can in fact harm a couple's chances for a stable marriage. More importantly, though, cohabitation involves the serious sin of fornication. It does not conform to God's plan for marriage and is always wrong and objectively sinful.”<sup>8</sup>

Cohabitation must be addressed delicately. On the one hand, clergy should be welcoming and see this as an opportunity for evangelization, yet at the same time they must uphold in absolutely clear terms the Church's teaching that sexual intimacy is only made authentically in the context of valid marriage.

The following should be considered when dealing with cohabiting couples:

- Approach the couple with patience and concern.
- Explore with them why they are cohabiting, and discuss the sociological and psychological ramifications of their situation. Address the problems cohabitation causes married couples.<sup>9</sup> Help them understand that cohabitation can and does touch on issues of fear and fidelity.

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<sup>8</sup> *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> ForYourMarriage.org provides a helpful reflection on this point. “**Doesn't living together before marriage prevent me from marrying the wrong person and thus getting divorced later on?** Although it may sound counterintuitive, studies show that cohabiting couples: Increase their risk of breaking up after marriage (46% higher divorce rate); Increase the risk of domestic violence for women, and the risk of physical and sexual abuse for children; Have lower levels of happiness and well-being compared to married couples.”

- Explore with them the reason that they are now approaching the Church for marriage (the risk of divorce is lessened if the decision to marry was made prior to the cohabitation).
- Help the couple to understand the wisdom behind the Church’s teaching on sexual intimacy within the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Encourage the couple to live separately and chastely before their marriage as a spiritual preparation for marriage (embracing what some have termed “secondary virginity”). Where a cohabiting couple already has children, the good of the children may prevent separation; however the couple should still be encouraged to practice chastity.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has provided a few helpful questions and answers on this topic.

(1) *If a couple is cohabiting, can marriage be denied or delayed?* Cohabitation and/or premarital sex are not canonical impediments to marriage. A couple may not be denied a wedding for these reasons alone, although additional time might be needed to address the issues raised by cohabitation such as the impact of cohabitation on the couple’s freedom to marry and their understanding of the Church’s teachings on marriage and sexuality. Absolute moral rectitude is not demanded for sacraments to be celebrated.

(2) *Should cohabiting couples be encouraged to separate prior to the wedding?* Yes, but the couple is not to be refused marriage if they fail to separate.

(3) *Is a simple wedding ceremony most appropriate for cohabiting couples?* Not necessarily. Canon Law gives no special consideration for marriages of cohabiting couples but states that couples should have a “fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage” (c.1063).

### **Cultural Considerations Cross-Cultural/Interracial Marriages**

It is wise for the priest or deacon to help couples identify cultural assumptions that may not be apparent to one another.

### **Intention to be childless**

A decision by the couple or one party to permanently exclude children invalidates a marriage. If such a statement is made to the priest or deacon, he must inform them of the seriousness of their decision, and strive in a pastoral manner to bring the couple to the point where they understand the Church’s teaching toward their agreement on openness to children. If, after this good faith effort, either or both parties still refuses to be open to children, the priest or deacon must inform the couple that they cannot be married in a Catholic Church.

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## **3.4 Other Issues**

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### **Citizenship Status**

Situations that may affect a couple’s ability to contract a marriage include: (1) marrying in order to remain in the U.S. or to gain citizenship (which impacts consent); and (2) couples who freely want to marry but one or both are in the U.S. illegally. Consult with the Chancery and/or civil legal counsel for legal clarification. *All priests and deacons are reminded that they are not to knowingly witness a marriage that violates civil law.*

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<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/dating-engaged/frequently-asked-questions/>. See also “Church Teachings: Cohabitation” <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/cohabitation/>.

### **Impotence and/or Infertility**

While infertility is not an impediment to marriage, if known in advance it should be discussed by the couple with openness and candor. Impotency, on the other hand, is an impediment to marriage. However, it must also be remembered that some forms of impotence are treatable or curable through modern medical technology. The priest or deacon must explore carefully and thoroughly when this issue is disclosed. Permanent inability to have intercourse nullifies marriage, but where there is doubt, the marriage is not be impeded on that ground (Canon 1084).

### **Long-distance marriage preparation**

Long distance preparation or attendance at a marriage preparation program as individuals (rather than as a couple) is sometimes necessary. Couples may reside in separate cities or at a great distance from the city where they will be married. Military or college chaplains can often provide independent preparation, but the presiding minister needs to coordinate the process. The couple should meet with him at least once, even if most of the preparation will be done long distance.

If the couple is unable to attend a marriage preparation program together, the priest/deacon or designated trained lay minister(s) can instruct and facilitate it one-on-one during a window of time that is opportune. If the bride and groom are prepared independently by different individuals (the least advisable option), care should be taken that they use the same marriage preparation program curriculum. The couple should be encouraged to thoroughly discuss when they are together whatever self/couple discovery emerges, as well as the material presented in the program. Separation is a challenge, but not a reason to omit completion of a marriage preparation program.

### **Non-registered Catholic(s)**

Canon Law does not make parish registration a prerequisite for marriage in the Catholic Church (Canon 1115). Consequently, parishes are discouraged from requiring the couple's registration and/or prior/ongoing financial support. Each situation is to be handled separately and delicately. The presumption of the Church is that people have a natural right to marry. The Church, therefore, is to provide a welcoming presence regardless of whether or not the couple is registered as parishioners.

### **Person(s) with Disabilities**

Disabilities can be physical or mental. As with questions of readiness, the priest or deacon should utilize the counsel of professionals who are knowledgeable about the particular disability if he has questions or reservations regarding the wisdom of proceeding toward marriage. Physical disability itself is not an impediment to marriage. With regard to mental disabilities, the priest or deacon needs to assess the couple's ability to give consent and to assume the essential obligations of marriage. (*See also "Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities," USCCB, 1995*).

### **Prenuptial Agreements**

A sacramental marriage is based on an enduring committed love and partnership for the whole of life – which implies a comprehensive sharing of both spiritual and temporal goods. Because prenuptial agreements commonly provide for the division of property in the event a couple divorces, they can potentially invalidate marital consent. However, a prenuptial agreement is not automatically a cause of invalid marital consent. An evaluation of such an agreement is necessary to determine if there are any conditions limiting consent. Particularly for remarriages, the difference between prenuptial agreements and wills is to be understood: a will provides for the management of one's estate upon death.

### **Sexual Identity**

For a sacramental marriage to be possible, the presumption is that a man and a woman asking to marry must understand themselves as a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman.<sup>10</sup> When either person expresses doubt or conflict about sexual identity or sexual orientation, careful attention must be given to both parties. If the couple has not dealt adequately with this issue, further assistance from a counseling professional is strongly recommended before proceeding with the wedding.

### **Sexually transmitted/communicable diseases**

The Church understands Christian marriage to be a covenantal relationship based on openness and honesty. Therefore, both people entering a marriage have a right to information that has major ramifications for their marriage. Being a carrier of a sexually transmitted and/or communicable disease is obviously something that needs to be disclosed to one's future spouse.

### **Unwillingness to participate in a Marriage Preparation Program**

Unwillingness to participate in a marriage preparation program can be considered a sign of lack of commitment to marry in the Church. However, the Church has a responsibility to provide adequate and varied options so there is no reasonable obstacle to participation (Canon 213).

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<sup>10</sup> "One of the most troubling developments in contemporary culture is the proposition that persons of the same sex can 'marry.' This proposal attempts to redefine the nature of marriage and the family and, as a result, harms both the intrinsic dignity of every human person and the common good of society. Marriage is a unique union, a relationship different from all others. It is the permanent bond between one man and one woman whose two-in-one-flesh communion of persons is an indispensable good at the heart of every family and every society. Same-sex unions are incapable of realizing this specific communion of persons...Male-female complementarity is intrinsic to marriage." *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009.

## SECTION 4 – RELATED ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF MARRIAGE

A continuing theme of Pope Francis’ writings and speeches is the need to provide support to couples beyond their initial reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Holy Father gives considerable attention to this topic, especially in *Amoris Laetitia*. He writes: “The Synod Fathers observed that ‘the initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament.’”<sup>11</sup>

There is great need for a vast array of initiatives in support of newly married couples, parents and families experiencing crisis. Much work remains to be done to offer encouragement to all married couples and to create a culture that recognizes the “dignity and beauty of marriage”<sup>12</sup>, a culture that encourages people to fully embrace this holy vocation and that respects the value of life-long marriage for the benefit of children and society as a whole.

Originally proposed by the Diocesan Marriage Commission, the following suggestions and ideas are provided to encourage discussion and discernment about ways to enhance the support given to married couples and families within the Diocese of Steubenville, especially in parishes.<sup>13</sup>

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### 4.1 – *Fostering A Culture Of Marriage*

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*What initiatives and activities can be offered to create a positive “marriage culture” – an atmosphere that recognizes that Christian Marriage is an ideal that is viable, healthy and attainable?*

- Priests are encouraged to preach about marriage as a vocation, proclaiming what Pope Francis has termed “The Gospel of the Family.” Married couples need to be challenged and encouraged to live out this vocation in love and truth. Young people need to be inspired by the Church’s beautiful vision for marriage and family life.<sup>14</sup>
- Pastors could consider supporting the USCCB initiative for the promotion and defense of marriage – Marriage: Unique for a Reason. Link to their website (<http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/>), show their educational videos, include quotes from the website in bulletins and websites, etc., as well as the efforts of the Marriage Reality Movement (<http://takebackmarriage.org/>).
- Pastors could consider promoting the USCCB “Call to Prayer for Life, Marriage and Religious Liberty.” (Learn more from their website: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/take-action-now/call-to-prayer/index.cfm>)

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<sup>11</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 223.

<sup>12</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 205.

<sup>13</sup> “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 202.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis writes: “The Synod Fathers stated in a number of ways that we need to help young people discover the dignity and beauty of marriage. They should be helped to perceive the attraction of a complete union that elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence, gives sexuality its deepest meaning, and benefits children by offering them the best context for their growth and development.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 205.

- More efforts could be made to form people in an adequate understanding of human sexuality through the *Theology of the Body*. This could be done through regular articles in the Steubenville Register, hosting a diocesan conference, offering presentations in parishes, etc.
- Pastors could encourage families to reach out to other families.<sup>15</sup>

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## 4.2 – Support For Newly Married Couples

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*How can we reach out in support of newly married couples? This was strongly emphasized by Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on the family.*

- As the Synod Fathers mentioned at various points during their discussions, there should be a means of accompanying the couple prior to and into their married life. It would be wonderful to have married couples who would be willing to serve in a kind of *mentor* role to younger couples.<sup>16</sup> Pastors could invite couples in stable and healthy marriages to consider this “ministry” and connect them with newly married couples.<sup>17</sup>
- Parishes (or ministries in the parish, such as the CWC) could provide newly married couples with a book or audio resource focused on laying a solid foundation for their marriage.<sup>18</sup>
- Pastors could contact newly married couples in the months following their marriage to bless their home as a way of reaching out to couples.<sup>19</sup> (Pastors could consider giving the couple a crucifix or some other religious item as a gift to commemorate the foundation of their family.)
- Recognition in the parish bulletin of announcement of engagement and marriage is an old tradition in the church. A welcome back into the faith community from their honeymoon at the end of Mass could be a catalyst for community unity.

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<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis observes: “The Synod Fathers emphasized that Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through ‘their joy-filled witness as domestic churches’. Consequently, ‘it is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that ‘fills hearts and lives’, because in Christ we have been ‘set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness’. As in the parable of the sower (cf. *Mt* 13:3-9), we are called to help sow seeds; the rest is God’s work. Nor must we forget that, in her teaching on the family, the Church is a sign of’. It is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning. Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for ‘an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family’.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> “In this regard, experienced couples have an important role to play. The parish is a place where such experienced couples can help younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 223.

<sup>17</sup> The Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life could provide suggestions and resources for interested pastors.

<sup>18</sup> One example would be *Just Married: The Catholic Guide to Surviving and Thriving in the First Five Years of Marriage* by Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak (<https://www.catholiccounselors.com/product/just-married-catholic-guide-surviving-thriving-first-five-years-marriage/>) Other books are also available on this topic.

<sup>19</sup> “Another way of growing closer is by blessing homes or by bringing a pilgrim image of Our Lady to houses in the neighbourhood; this provides an opportunity for a pastoral conversation about the family’s situation.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 230.

- Parishes could organize “prayer partners” for newly married couples. Parishioners who volunteer for this “ministry” could be assigned to pray daily or weekly for a newly married couple for the first year or perhaps the first three years of their marriage. Prayer partners could consider sending notes of encouragement to the couple as well.
- Pastors could offer Mass for married couples on their one year anniversary.
- Pastors, or the minister who prepares a couple for marriage, could reach out to them after their first year of marriage, inviting them to meet with him to discuss how things are going.
- Parishes could organize “couple dinners” directed especially toward younger married couples, perhaps surrounding Valentine’s Day.<sup>20</sup>
- Perhaps a diocesan invitation to couples married during the previous 12 months to attend a reception with “ice breakers” and a small motivating talk could be planned.

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### 4.3 - Support For Parents

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*How can we educate, support and encourage parents, and thereby foster healthy families?*

- Catholic Schools could assist parents by offering programs that would help to form and support them in their vocation as parents, and to strengthen their marriages.
- Parishes could routinely offer childcare during parish events and meetings. (For example, offering childcare for parents wishing to attend Natural Family Planning classes would be extremely helpful.)
- The diocese could initiate programs that would assist parents in their role as the primary educators of their children, especially in human and sexual formation. This could be done either by working with existing ministries (such as Family Honor, Inc.) or by creating our own diocesan curriculum and ministry for this purpose.
- Pastors are encouraged to use the occasions of sacramental celebrations to offer encouragement and support to parents. Pope Francis observed: “It is true that many couples, once married, drop out of the Christian community. Often, however, we ourselves do not take advantage of those occasions when they do return, to remind them of the beautiful ideal of Christian marriage and the support that our parishes can offer them. I think, for example, of the Baptism and First Holy Communion of their children, or the funerals or weddings of their relatives or friends. Almost all married couples reappear on these occasions, and we should take greater advantage of this.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis observed: “Nor should we underestimate the pastoral value of traditional religious practices. To give just one example: I think of Saint Valentine’s Day; in some countries, commercial interests are quicker to see the potential of this celebration than are we in the Church.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 208.

<sup>21</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 230.

*How can we reach out in support of married couples in all stages of marriage?*

- As noted above, priests can preach about marriage as a vocation, proclaiming what Pope Francis has termed “The Gospel of the Family.”
- “Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow. These might include: meetings of couples living in the same neighbourhood, brief retreats for couples; talks by experts on concrete issues facing families, marriage counselling, home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires, social services dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence, programmes of spiritual growth, workshops for parents with troubled children and family meetings. The parish office should be prepared to deal helpfully and sensitively with family needs and be able to make referrals, when necessary, to those who can help.”<sup>22</sup>
- Pastors could encourage families to come together and support one another. As Pope Francis noted, “there is also the contribution made by groups of married couples that provide assistance as part of their commitment to service, prayer, formation and mutual support. Such groups enable couples to be generous, to assist other families and to share the faith; at the same time they strengthen marriages and help them to grow.”<sup>23</sup>
- Articles and resources for married couples could be included regularly in the *Steubenville Register*.
- Parishes could provide or promote retreats for married couples. These could be retreats on location or “virtual retreats” where couples use printed materials or materials online to pray at home.
- Pastors could “encourage families to grow in faith. This means encouraging frequent confession, spiritual direction and occasional retreats. It also means encouraging family prayer during the week, since ‘the family that prays together stays together’.”<sup>24</sup>
- Pastors could consider including resources and activities in the bulletin designed to assist married couples. These could include books, audio presentations, websites, parenting tips, communication tips, etc. (The US Bishop’s initiative [www.ForYourMarriage.org](http://www.ForYourMarriage.org) highlights a great variety of enrichment materials.)
- Parishes could promote World Wide Marriage Encounter and other activities for married couples.
- Pastors could consider launching enrichment programs for married couples, such as *A Marriage Made for Heaven*<sup>25</sup> by Gregory K. Popcak, MSW, PhD and Lisa A. Popcak, or *Discovering Our Deepest Desire*<sup>26</sup> by Greg Schutte, MSW, LISW-S.

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<sup>22</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 229.

<sup>23</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, 227.

- World Wide Marriage Encounter endorses “a night out supper” on St. Valentine’s Day. Such a program was once held at Holy Family Church with a hall-filled attendance for \$25.00 a couple.
- The diocese could explore opportunities to assist priests, deacons, religious and lay pastoral ministers by providing them with greater resources and skills for addressing the needs of married couples and families.<sup>27</sup>
- The Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life should continue and expand events such as the “Marriage Enrichment Day.”

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#### 4.5 - Support For Married Couples Experiencing Difficulties

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*How can we reach out to couples who are struggling in their marriage?*

- Pastors could consider referring hurting couples to Retrouvaille Retreats. (Perhaps parishes could consider assisting couples with the expenses involved in participating in a retreat as well as an act of mercy toward a family in need.)
- The Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life can assist with referrals for counseling services. (Pastors are also encouraged to develop and identify resources in their local communities.)
- The diocese could consider expanding the outreach of Catholic Charities by providing counseling services at no cost or a reduced cost in different regions of the diocese.
- Infertility is often a great trial for married couples. Pastoral outreach could be offered to couples struggling with this issue, assisting them to discern how God is calling them to be fruitful in their marriage – either through adoption<sup>28</sup> or through other ways of participating in the life of the community.<sup>29</sup> Pastors should also encourage infertile couples to learn natural family planning, as this is sometimes a means to achieve pregnancy.

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<sup>25</sup> Learn more about *A Marriage Made for Heaven* at <https://www.catholiccounselors.com/product-category/marriage-made-for-heaven/>.

<sup>26</sup> Learn more about *Discovering Our Deepest Desire* at <http://ourdeepestdesire.com>.

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis observed: “Along with a pastoral outreach aimed specifically at families, this shows the need for ‘a more adequate formation... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers’. In the replies given to the worldwide consultation, it became clear that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families. . . .The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 202, 204.

<sup>28</sup> “Adoption is a very generous way to become parents. I encourage those who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation. They will never regret having been generous.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> “We also do well to remember that procreation and adoption are not the only ways of experiencing the fruitfulness of love...Christian families should never forget that ‘faith does not remove us more deeply into it... Each of us, in fact, has a special role in preparing for the coming of God’s kingdom in our world’.” *Amoris Laetitia*, 181.

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#### 4.6 - Other Areas Of Support

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*How can we offer care and compassion to individuals and families experiencing various needs?*

- Parishes could establish support groups for the divorced. (Perhaps several parishes could collaborate to make this a shared ministry.)
- The diocese could work to combat pornography, which is so prevalent and so damaging to marriage. Educational and outreach materials could be made available to confessors and those working with families.
- Pastors could be notified of the various local support groups and resources available for addictions, domestic violence, same-sex attractions<sup>30</sup>, etc. so they can refer parishioners as needed.
- The Catholic Bishops of Ohio could encourage medical insurance providers to include instruction in methods of Natural Family Planning as one of the service covered in standard insurance policies.

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<sup>30</sup> Courage is a Catholic outreach and support ministry for those who experience same-sex attraction. (A Courage chapter is active in the Diocese of Steubenville.) EnCourage is a Catholic ministry that seeks to support parents who have children with same-sex attraction. For more information about these ministries, visit [www.couragerc.org](http://www.couragerc.org).



## DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

### MARRIAGE CHECKLIST

*This checklist is provided for the use of couples preparing for marriage. Pastors may choose to modify this form (or create their own form) to accommodate the needs of their individual parishes, provided that they include all the requirements of the Marriage Formation Policy.*

Groom: \_\_\_\_\_ Bride: \_\_\_\_\_

Priest or deacon preparing you for marriage: \_\_\_\_\_

Priest or deacon officiating your marriage ceremony: \_\_\_\_\_

Planned location of marriage ceremony: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **FIVE STEPS TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE**

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##### **Step 1 - Meetings with Priest or Deacon**

*Six to twelve months prior to the anticipated wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be preparing them for marriage.*

- Initial Meeting
- Subsequent Meetings

##### **Step 2 - Comprehensive Introduction to the Theology of the Body\***

*The engaged couple must complete an introduction to the Theology of the Body.*

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Material or Program Used: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Step 3 - Marriage Life-Skills Workshop or Retreat**

*The engaged couple must attend an approved marriage life-skills workshop or retreat. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple's file.*

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Step 4 - Course in Natural Family Planning\***

*Each couple must attend a diocesan-approved course in natural family planning. A certificate of completion is to be placed in the couple's file.*

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Method Learned: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Step 5 - Finalize Preparations**

*One to two months prior to the wedding date, the engaged couple will meet with the priest or deacon who will be officiating at the wedding to finalize all preparations.*

- Final preparations completed

#### **OTHER DETAILS**

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- State of Ohio Marriage License received
- Copies of Baptismal Certificates received
- Witnesses approved by priest or deacon
- Date for Wedding Rehearsal established
- Liturgical Ministers (altar servers, reader, cantor, etc.) approved by priest or deacon
- Music selected and approved by priest or deacon

\* See the website of the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life for options: [www.diosteub.org/family](http://www.diosteub.org/family)