



ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA
FAMILY LIFE OFFICE

PREPARING ENGAGED COUPLES
FOR THE SACRAMENT
OF MARRIAGE :

*ENCOUNTER, COMMUNION
AND MISSION*

*Jesus [was]
also invited
to the
wedding.*

John 2:2



Why marriage preparation?

The couple's whole time of courtship and engagement is a period of discernment. "Marriage preparation," that is, couples meeting with the priest/deacon, attending classes, etc. is not simply a requirement to be fulfilled, or an education to be acquired. Marriage preparation is a time of waiting: anticipating what will come on the wedding day, and every day after, meditating on the meaning of the sacrament, and what difference inviting Christ into their lives makes to the couple.

*Make known to me your ways, LORD;
teach me your paths.
Psalm 25:3-4*

An approach to marriage preparation.

Preparing couples for marriage is the responsibility of the **whole Church community**, not only priests, deacons, and witness couples. The Church community has a responsibility to offer prayers for the couples, and to nurture and support them – greeting them on a Sunday morning and offering kind words of encouragement, for example.

When working with couples directly – either individually, or in larger group meetings – the purpose must be, first and foremost, to introduce the couple to the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the source, summit, and model of all love, so it is essential that the couple’s journey of faith be centered on Him.

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 it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This...is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself".

The Redeemer of Man 10
Pope John Paul II

Marriage preparation: a model

In preparing couples for marriage, we recognize that each couple—each individual person—is at a distinct place in his/her faith journey. Some have deep faith lives—both Catholic and non-Catholic— and are eager to invite God into their lives during their engagement, and especially when they are married. Others approach marriage preparation as a requirement to be filled, one more item to check off the list of things to do before the wedding day.

Some couples are living chastely and apart from each other; others are sexually active, and/or cohabiting. Above all, however, they are women and men who, regardless of their backgrounds or their levels of faith, desire one thing: to love and be loved by the person with whom they become engaged, and to give themselves completely to each other. It is on that level—speaking to that basic desire for love—that we can introduce them to the Love Who will sustain them in their relationship, and Who desires their good.



If Christ is the source, summit and model for marital love, then the mode of preparation for marriage must be centered on Him. God Himself is the author of marriage, and we listen to His word, follow His design, and communicate His plan through **sacramental preparation**. We must prepare the couples we meet for “marriage in the Lord,” and if they do not know who He is, or why His presence is important, it is our responsibility and our task to introduce the God who is Love to them.

Encounter, Communion and Mission:
United to Each Other to be
a Sign of Christ's Love in the World

I. Encounter

God is love, and His love for us is expressed in our creation, our being, and the ultimate sacrifice He makes for us, through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. The life and sacrifice of Christ teaches us *how* to love. Love is a *total gift of self*, which enables us to see each other the way God sees us.

Marital love entails making a covenant (based on the covenant God makes with His people) that is faithful, life-giving and enduring.

Christian marriage is sacramental – the couple invites God into their marriage, and He in turn invites them to participate in His communion of Divine Life and Love.

II. Communion

Our communication with each other is rooted in the Divine Communication of God as Trinity. Communication does not simply entail utilizing “skills.” To communicate with each other is to take a stance of **being for** the other, and having everything we say and do come from that stance.

Marital intimacy is sharing the total gift of oneself (physical, spiritual and emotional).

The intimate communion of husband and wife (expressed in their sexual union, as well as in how they share every other aspect of their lives together) is a sharing of covenantal love (wedding vows). Covenantal love is also lived in the management of the household, the good stewardship of resources, and the education of children. Thus responsible parenthood entails prudence and generosity in the couple's openness to the gift of life. Natural Family Planning is at the service of responsible parenthood, respecting the nature of the conjugal act as nurturing love and life, and promoting the couple's cooperation with each other and God.

III. Mission

Upon encountering God, we must then cultivate a relationship with Him—just as we nurture our relationships with each other. Each man and woman can experience God and His love in and through his/her spouse – and communicate God's love to him/her, through witness and self-gift. The family becomes a *domestic church* – communicating the love of Christ to others (in the family, community, parish and beyond).

Marriage Preparation: A Model

I. Christian Marriage : Communion of Love and Life

- God is love.
- Love is total gift of self.
- Love is seeing the other as God sees him/her.
- Love is the vocation of every person.

Christian marriage is sacramental – the couple invites God into their marriage, and He in turn invites them to participate in His communion of Divine Life and Love.

***Core theme: Love as total self-giving**

II. Called to Communion: Communicating in Truth and Love

- Communication does not simply entail utilizing “skills”
- Our communication with each other is rooted in the Divine Communication of God as Trinity.

To communicate with each other is to take a stance of **being for** the other.

***Core theme: The image of “nakedness without shame” (trust, openness to the other, and seeing him/her as God does).**

III. Called to Communion:

Communicating in Unitive and Fruitful Love

- Marital intimacy is sharing the total gift of oneself.
- Chastity is **integration, not repression**, and respects the truth of the person (naked without shame).
- Sex expresses covenantal love.
- Responsible parenthood – prudence and generosity.
- NFP is at the service of responsible parenthood, and respects the nature of the conjugal act as nurturing love and life.

***Core theme: Chastity includes refraining from sexual relations *before* marriage, as well as *in* marriage for a variety of reasons.**

Chastity also applies to the sexual union of the married couple: to engage in the nuptial union *chastely* means to seek the good of the other, and not merely to use him/her as a means to the end of one's personal satisfaction.)

The virtue of chastity blossoms in *friendship*. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is expressed notably in *friendship with one's neighbor*. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion. (CCC# 2347)

**VI. The Mission of Marriage:
Building a Civilization of Love**

- What is prayer?
- Experiencing God and His love in and through my spouse – and communicating God’s love to him/her through my love, witness, and self-gift.
- The family as *domestic church* – communicating Christ to others (in the family, community, parish and beyond); a way of being “fruitful.”
- The meaning of “mission” for the Christian family.
- Ways to live out our mission as a Domestic Church.

***Core theme: The family as *domestic church*, promoting a culture of life and a civilization of love.**

As for me and my household,
we will serve the LORD."

Joshua 24:15

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“When husband and wife are united in marriage they no longer seem like something earthly, but rather like the image of God Himself.”

St. John Chrysostom