

## What God Has Joined: The Marriage Catechumenate



St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* spoke of the urgent need for adequate immediate preparation for marriage. He stated, “Among the elements to be instilled in this journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage, as well as preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy.”

Leading up to the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family, Cardinal Robert Sarah, head of the Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship, proposed what he called a conjugal catechumenate that consists of the following steps: the healing of human love; conversion to authentic conjugal love; openness to prayer and God’s grace; the intention to receive a sacrament that will be a true means of salvation and sanctity. In an address to the Roman Rota, Pope Francis repeated the “need for a new marriage catechumenate.” He also instructed that “priority should be given to a renewed proclamation of the kerygma [as well as] attractive and helpful information that helps couples live the rest of their lives together with great courage and generosity.”

While the marriage preparation process necessarily involves several unique identifiable steps, ideally the engaged couples will experience marriage preparation as a process of accompaniment with the parish community, instead of a mere checklist of requirements.

### What are the unique features of the marriage catechumenate?

**Evangelization.** Marriage preparation presents a unique opportunity to introduce or re-introduce a couple to the joyful life of faith in the Catholic Church. For this to happen, it is essential that evangelization of the engaged couple permeates every aspect of marriage preparation. There are opportunities for retreats throughout the period of marriage preparation, including Genesis: A Pre-Canva Retreat, among others. Another opportunity for evangelization is an accompaniment-based marriage preparation program, which is described in the next section below.

**Accompaniment.** The engaged couple should be welcomed by the parish marriage evangelization team and gradually led throughout the marriage preparation process into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ and one another. There are parish-based accompaniment programs such as Witness to Love and Fully Engaged that have been developed to help engaged couples connect with a mentor couple with the goal of forming a strong community at the parish for ongoing spiritual support beyond the wedding day.

**Catechesis.** Catechesis on the meaning of the sacrament of marriage and the gift of sexuality permeates the various accompaniment-based parish marriage preparation programs, Genesis retreat, and Natural Family Planning course. Engaged couples will be equipped to enter the vocation of marriage understanding that the Church's teachings are a great 'YES' to a life of abundant joy, even amidst struggles, as they unite themselves fully to the Lord and place their trust in His unfailing promises. By the time of the wedding, the bride and groom will be prepared to make a complete gift of self, entering into marriage fully intending what the Church intends: the good of the spouses, life-long fidelity, and openness to life.

### **What resources are available for parishes to accompany engaged couples?**

**Witness to Love** is at the cutting edge of the marriage catechumenate, providing a real and practical solution to successfully integrate engaged couples back into the life of the parish. Witness to Love is revolutionizing marriage preparation by asking the engaged couple choose their own mentor couple. Through this process, divorces are practically non-existent and Mass attendance among newly married couples has skyrocketed.

[www.witnesstolove.org](http://www.witnesstolove.org)

**Fully Engaged** is a Catholic catechetical premarital inventory designed to help engaged couples solidify the foundation upon which they, together with Christ, will build their Sacrament of Marriage. Grounded in Church teaching and loaded with catechetical content, this dynamic premarital inventory is a trustworthy guide that meets the real challenges today's couples face. [www.getfullyengaged.com](http://www.getfullyengaged.com)

Both **Witness to Love** and **Fully Engaged** offer training and materials in Spanish.

Another option is the **FOCCUS® Pre-Marriage Inventory**, which is a comprehensive, user-friendly tool for use by lay individuals, couples or professionals who are helping couples prepare for marriage, and who become trained as FOCCUS Facilitators. The FOCCUS® Inventory is designed to help engaged couples appreciate their unique relationship, learn more about themselves, and discuss topics important to their lifelong marriage.

<https://www.foccusinc.com/foccus-inventory.aspx>

To learn more about these, please contact our team at 513-263-6648.

## **Does the Archdiocese offer a retreat for engaged couples?**

The Marriage and Family Evangelization team organizes **Genesis: A Pre-Cana Retreat** in English and Spanish throughout the archdiocese. The retreat typically lasts from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm and offers engaging presentations on the sacrament of marriage by teams of married couples, focusing on what it means to say “yes” to each of the questions of consent. The retreat also offers a unique opportunity for couples to pray together in adoration, go to Confession, spend time alone in conversation, and form friendships with other engaged couples. Visit our [marriage preparation website](#) for more information and dates of upcoming Genesis retreats.

Other retreat options include Three to Get Married, which is organized and led by Regnum Christi couples, and Catholic Engaged Encounter.

## **Are Natural Family Planning courses part of the marriage catechumenate?**

The final aspect of the marriage catechumenate is a Natural Family Planning (NFP) course. Couples who practice NFP in their marriage see many benefits: stronger communication and intimacy, and a deepened trust in God’s plan for their shared gift of fertility. An NFP course provides education in fertility awareness, and offers couples several private follow-up sessions with a certified NFP instructor. Couples should start their NFP course at least three months before their wedding day to allow time for them to learn how to observe and chart their signs of fertility.

The [NFP website](#) includes information on upcoming NFP classes and descriptions of the various NFP methods available throughout the archdiocese.

## **What happens after the wedding day?**

All marriages need strengthening. For this, parishes can turn to a variety of marriage enrichment initiatives, some of which are listed in our [Resources page](#).

A unique aspect of ongoing evangelization, accompaniment and catechesis is the need for more retreat opportunities for married couples. The Marriage and Family Evangelization team is praying and developing a new retreat in 2022 to assist with this need. Please contact us at 513-263-6648 if you have questions or would like to volunteer to help us.