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The Marriage Catechumenate



In June of 2022, the Vatican Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life published the [Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life](#) [CPML]. This document brings together ideas given to the Church by St. John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*, along with teaching by Cardinal Robert Sarah and Pope Francis.

The marriage catechumenate “consists of three distinct stages: proximate preparation, final preparation, and accompaniment during the first years of married life. (CPML, 24)”

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. The marriage catechumenate “is not a preparation for an ‘exam to pass,’ but for a ‘life to live’ (CPML, 20).”

What are the unique features of the marriage catechumenate?

Evangelization and discipleship. 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 and discipleship of the engaged couple permeate every aspect of marriage preparation. There are opportunities for retreats throughout the period of marriage preparation, including Genesis: A Pre-Cana 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 stages of the marriage catechumenate. 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 intend to 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 enter into marriage fully intending what the Church intends: the good of the spouses, life-long fidelity, and openness to life. After the wedding day, the newly married couple will continue to grow in understanding of the sacrament of marriage.

What resources are available for parishes?

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati endorses the following parish programs, and encourages parishes who do not yet use one of these to speak with staff in the Marriage and Family Evangelization team to learn more about the options and to find out about upcoming virtual or in person training sessions for new facilitators. Archdiocesan Marriage and Family staff can be reached at 513-263-6648, or email us at avasquez@catholicaoc.org.

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 nonexistent and Mass attendance among newly married couples has skyrocketed. 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

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

Another option is to use both **Witness to Love** and the **FOCCUS® Pre-Marriage Inventory**. FOCCUS 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>

Does the Archdiocese offer a retreat for engaged couples?

Yes! The Marriage and Family Evangelization team offers **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 includes 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. There is a unique version of this retreat, Genesis II, for couples entering marriage after the death of a spouse or after receiving a decree of nullity. Visit our [Genesis retreat page](#) 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?

An important aspect of the marriage catechumenate is a catechesis on the virtue of chastity as it relates to marriage. A great way to integrate the meaning of marital chastity is to take a full 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?

The third stage of the marriage catechumenate is accompaniment of married couples in the first several years of married life. As newly baptized members of the Church enter into a “Mystagogy,” or “introduction into the mystery,” so too newly married couples “should be helped to feel the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage itself (CPML, 77).” The newly married couple ideally has a mentor couple and opportunities at the parish for date nights, small group gatherings, and other formation and fellowship opportunities.

For suggestions on initiatives to strengthen marriage, parishes can visit our [Resources page](#).

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati Marriage and Family Evangelization team is praying and developing a new retreat to assist with this need. Please contact us at 513-263-6648 if you have questions or would like to volunteer to help us.