

What God Has Joined: The New 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 recent 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, and the intention to receive a sacrament that will be a true means of salvation and sanctity.

In a recent 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. As marriage preparation presents a unique opportunity to introduce or re-

introduce a couple to the joyful life of faith in the Catholic Church, it is essential that evangelization of the engaged couple permeates every aspect of marriage preparation. The young couple should be welcomed and gradually led throughout the marriage preparation process into an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ and one another.

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: permanence, fidelity, and openness to life. They will grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord and one another and be able to appreciate the Church's beautiful teaching on married love and life. They will enter the vocation of marriage viewing the Church's teachings, not as a set of prohibitions, but as 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.

What's "NEW" in the New Marriage Catechumenate?

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



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

An Engaged Retreat Day replaces the former Archdiocesan Pre-Cana day. Engaged couples are longing for more than a simple one-day seminar covering various topics. Deep in their hearts, young couples desire to “discover the dignity and beauty of marriage” as well as “the deepest meaning of sexuality.”

A Natural Family Planning Class Series will provide positive relational benefits to live a free, total, faithful, and fruitful marriage. Today's engaged couples find great benefit in a full Natural Family Planning class series. Though many couples are initially reluctant, by the end of the third NFP class, over 90% of engaged couples say that they would recommend the classes to a friend, and 98% find the classes beneficial to their marriage. Today's young couples are not merely open to the beauty of Natural Family Planning, they are really hungering for a way to plan their family that is both natural and in accord with the deepest desires of our heart.

The Ruah Woods Marriage Prep Program, Catholic Engaged Encounter, or Parish Pre-Cana Programs remain valid options for couples in lieu of the Archdiocesan Engaged Retreat Day. Also, FOCCUS will continue to be administered and scored by the Office for Marriage & Family Life for as long as your parish would like to continue with FOCCUS.