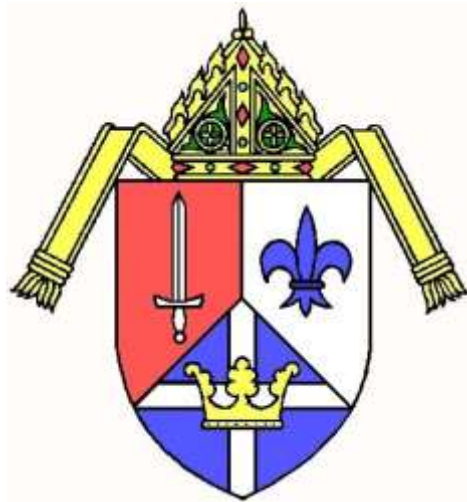


Marriage Preparation Policy
Catholic Diocese of Lexington, KY

Originally promulgated December 3, 2006
**Revised 2020*



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Introduction

The marriage preparation policy of the Diocese of Lexington seeks to maximize our pastoral, catechetical and evangelistic effectiveness in presenting couples with a robust vision of Christian marriage. The marriage preparation process enables the Church to journey with engaged couples, helping them understand the nature of marriage and the virtues and skills necessary to live it.

The relationship between the Catholic community and engaged couples is mutually beneficial. The Church can help couples see, in the words of Pope Francis, “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.”¹ At the same time, Catholic communities can “recognize the great benefit that they themselves receive from supporting engaged couples as they grow in love.”²

The importance of marriage preparation proceeds from the sacramental nature of holy matrimony, through which couples participate in the grace of God in Jesus Christ and convey that grace to others. Via a covenant of mutual consent, Christian spouses enter into an “intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love”³ in which they participate in the unity of the triune God. Through marriage, couples embody the faithful love of Jesus for the Church, open themselves to the blessing of parenthood, and in their daily lives enter a school of self-giving that works toward their own sanctification and the redemption of the world. “The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon...capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior.”⁴

In recent generations, belief in the permanence of marriage has weakened within the Church and society. Young people are often avoiding or delaying marriage, or choosing to cohabitate in non-marital, de facto unions. For those Catholics who do seek marriage, many may lack a clear understanding of the nature of Christian marriage, sexual morality, and even the Catholic faith.

Thus, this process seeks to be properly thorough without creating unneeded obstacles. “Each local Church will discern how best to provide a suitable formation without distancing young people from the sacrament.... Quality is more important than quantity, and priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together ‘with great courage and generosity’. Marriage preparation should be a kind of ‘initiation’ to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.”⁵

This process can also help couples “recognize eventual problems and risks... to realize the wisdom of breaking off a relationship whose failure and painful aftermath can be foreseen. In their initial enchantment... couples can attempt to conceal or relativize certain things and to avoid disagreements; only later do problems surface. [T]hey should be strongly encouraged to discuss what each expects from marriage, what they understand by love and commitment, what each wants from the other and what kind of life they would like to build together.”⁶

¹*Amoris Laetitia* ¶205

²*Ibid* ¶207

³*Gaudium et Spes* ¶48

⁴*Amoris Laetitia* ¶11

⁵*Ibid* ¶207

⁶*Ibid* ¶209

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The Ordinary Preparation Process

(For Spanish language couples, couples seeking the convalidation of civil unions, or second marriages, see subsequent section for clarification.)

1. At least six months before the desired wedding date, the couple will make initial contact with the parish, and request a meeting with a priest, deacon, or a designated member of the parish staff. In this meeting, couples will have an opportunity to share their story, establish their freedom to marry, and be directed toward the other phases of the process. Ideally, couples will be scheduled to complete the FOCCUS inventory, a pre-marital survey designed to help couples indicate strength and growth areas in their relationship. Their responses to that survey will be compiled into a “couple report,” which will be used by a trained FOCCUS facilitator to enable conversations in key areas between the potential husband and wife.¹ For more information about the marriage preparation process, see cdlex.org/family.

Note: To begin the process of marriage preparation, couples must be free to marry in the Church. If either party has an existing marriage bond, a declaration of nullity must be received before attending marriage preparation sessions.

2. The couple should attend a "God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage" seminar, presented by the Diocesan Family Life Office, in which they will gain a better understanding of the nature of Christian marriage and sexuality (see brochure/schedule at cdlex.org/family).²

3. The couple should participate in "Married Life" skills and virtue training by meeting with a married Sponsor Couple from the parish or by attending a parish-based Married Life workshop led by a married couple. This will help couples better understand the daily opportunities and challenges of married life (see brochure/schedule at cdlex.org/family).³

Note: Steps 2 and 3 above may be completed by attending a "Christian Marriage Weekend" retreat, presented two times per year by the Family Life Office (see brochure/schedule at cdlex.org/family). In special circumstances, and at the discretion of the presiding minister, the couple may use alternate ways to completing steps #2 and #3 above, in consultation with the Family Life Office Director (via an on-line program).

4. The couple should complete a full course in Natural Family Planning in which couples can learn how to steward their fertility in a way that corresponds to the deepest meaning of marital love, without contraceptives or sterilization (see brochure/schedule at cdlex.org/family).⁴

Note: For a couple beyond childbearing years or otherwise infertile, this component may be omitted at the discretion of the preparing minister.

5. Schedule a follow-up meeting with the priest/deacon witnessing the marriage in order to review the experience of marriage preparation and to make final determinations regarding the wedding service and liturgy.

¹*Amoris Laetitia* ¶209 (FOCCUS helps couples to recognize and discuss potential “problems and risks.”)

²*Ibid* ¶205 (The God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage Course presents couples “the attraction of a complete union that elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence, [and] gives sexuality its deepest meaning.”)

³*Ibid* ¶206 (The Married Life component facilitates parishes’ training couples in the “importance of the virtues.”)

⁴*Ibid* ¶73-74 (The Natural Family Planning component helps couples grow in their understanding of the mutual self-giving and openness to life that marks the spousal sexual union)

Additional clarifications

For Spanish-speaking couples

The diocese is in process of developing a more consistent approach of marriage preparation for engaged couples who speak Spanish. The Spanish language version of the course described in #2 above, “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage,” is “El Plan de Dios para un matrimonio llena de alegría.” This course is currently offered at the Catholic Center (or virtually) three times per year. The Married Life component is fulfilled, ideally, via the FOCCUS survey in Spanish coupled with questions and video presentations from either “Unidos en El Amor de Dios,” or “Sí, Quiero: Claves para un matrimonio feliz.” Natural Family Planning is available on-line in Spanish through the Couple-to-Couple League or via groups at a local parish.

For a Couple Seeking the Convalidation of a Civil Union

In the case of a couple civilly married seeking convalidation, the preparing and/or presiding minister can exercise discernment to determine the couple’s readiness to marry. For couples who have been civilly married for more than a few years, the FOCCUS instrument and “Married Life” component can be dispensed with at the discretion of the presiding minister, provided that the presiding minister documents his attestation to the stability of the couple’s civil union. Even so, the couple may benefit from a sponsor couple relationship within the parish that accompanies them toward marriage. The “God’s Plan” component should not be dispensed with, however, as it specifically addresses the differences between a Catholic marriage and a civil union.

For a Couples with a Prior Attempt at Marriage

In the case of a couple seeking marriage when one or both parties have had prior attempts at marriage (whether widowed or having received a declaration of nullity), the “God’s Plan” course component should be completed by the couple. Regarding the Married Life component, the couple would benefit from a sponsor couple relationship in fulfillment of the Married Life component (as opposed to the Married Life seminar, which is by nature designed to younger couples). At the discernment of the preparing minister, the couple could benefit from individualized therapy.

**Diocesan Approved Resources for the
Catechetical Components of Marriage Preparation**
(* indicates resource is available in Spanish)

For The God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage Component

God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage

-Workbooks and accompanying text, "Good News about Sex and Marriage."

Ascension press

www.ascensionpress.com

"El Plan de Dios para un matrimonio llena de alegría"

For the Married Life Component/Sponsor Couple Programs (Facilitated by trained couples)

Marriage: Small Steps, Big Rewards

Ray Guarendi, Ph.D.

Servant Publications

Available on Amazon

Accompanying workbook available from the Family Life Office

The Four Keys to Everlasting Love: How Your Catholic Marriage Can Bring You Joy for a Lifetime

Karee Santos and Manuel P. Santos, MD

Ave Maria Press

Available on Amazon

Sí, Quiero: Claves para un Matrimonio Feliz

Goya Producciones

Goyaproducciones.com

DVD study/Preguntas de discusión escritas por la Oficina de Vida Familiar

*For Better and For Ever: A Resource for Couples Preparing for Christian Marriage

Robert A. Ruhnke C. SS. R., D. Min.

Marriage Preparation Resources

1617 Iowa Street

San Antonio, TX 78203

210-534-1129

www.marriagepreparation.com

Today and All the Days of Your Life

Archdiocese of St. Louis and Liguori Publications

Liguori Publications

One Liguori Drive

Liguori, MO 63057-9999

800-325-9521

www.liguori.org

For the Married Life Component/Parish-Based “Married Life” Workshops

*Life Skills for Couples

Tom McCabe and Gregory Popcak, Ph.D.

Ascension Press

www.ascensionpress.com

Habilidades de la vida cotidiana para parejas

*Together in God’s Love: A Catholic Preparation for Marriage

Joseph White, Ph.D.

Our Sunday Visitor

Orderosv.com

Unidos en El Amor de Dios

Sí, Quiero: Claves para un Matrimonio Feliz

Goya Producciones

Goyaproducciones.com

DVD curso/Preguntas de discusión escritas por la Oficina de Vida Familiar

Today and All the Days of Your Life

Archdiocese of St. Louis and Liguori Publications

Liguori Publications

One Liguori Drive

Liguori, MO 63057-9999

800-325-9521

www.liguori.org

Unitas: Preparing for Sacramental Marriage

John Heaney-Hunter and Louis Primavera, Ph.D.’s

The Crossroad Publishing Company

370 Lexington Avenue

New York, NY 10017

www.amazon.com

For the Natural Family Planning component

All approved NFP instruction/methods listed at cdlex.org/natural-family-planning