



# CURRICULUM FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION



ARCHDIOCESE OF  
SAINT BONIFACE  
2011

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.  
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is  
God's work.*

*Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies  
beyond us.*

*No statement says all that could be said.*

*No prayer fully expresses our faith.*

*No confession brings perfection.*

*No pastoral visit brings wholeness.*

*No program accomplishes the Church's mission.*

*No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

*This is what we are about.*



*We plant the seeds that one day will grow.*

*We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold  
future promise.*

*We lay foundations that will need further development.*

*We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.*

*This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.*

*It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for  
the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.*

*We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master  
builder and the worker.*

*We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.*

*We are prophets of a future not our own.*

**ARCHBISHOP OSCAR A ROMERO**

## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEW DOCUMENT?

At the request of His Grace, Archbishop Albert LeGatt, a process was put in place in April of 2010 to consult the clergy and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface regarding the needs of those preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage. With their input, the goal was to create a curriculum for a unified approach to the preparation for this sacrament. A committee was formed by the Archbishop, composed of couples involved or previously involved in offering Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese. This committee studied not only what the Church of Saint Boniface had to say about preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, but also what the teachings of the Church are on this subject.

The purpose of this document is to share the fruits of this study. It presents an outline of topics and objectives to be covered in Marriage Preparation. It also suggests methods of fostering one-on-one relationships between mentor couples and those couples preparing for the Sacrament. It is hoped that this outline will inspire and encourage those involved in Marriage Preparation to see themselves as true evangelisers, responding to their call to share (by example and through testimony) their experience of living the Sacrament of Marriage in daily life. Marriage becomes sacramental when husband and wife give themselves to each other in love as Christ gives himself to us. The sharing of how this experience of Sacrament is significant should be at the heart of Marriage Preparation.

It also is important to note that the “approach” in the offering of Marriage Preparation is as important as the content. Marriage Preparation should not simply be a matter of covering topics, but of getting to know the couples, finding out who they are, where they’re coming from, and what their hopes and expectations are. Facilitator couples should “be capable of welcoming the engaged, whatever their social and culture extraction, intellectual formation and concrete capacities may be. Moreover, their faithful life witness and joyful giving are indispensable conditions for carrying out their task. Based on their own experiences in life and human problems, they can offer some starting points for enlightening the engaged with Christian wisdom” (*PSM 43*). Adequate formation must be offered for these facilitator couples, and will be made available by the Archdiocesan office for Marriage and Family.

In this document, readers are invited to explore the teachings of the Church as well as the topics and objectives outlined in order to recognize how they are already, in many ways, bringing life to these topics in their presentations to engaged couples. They are also invited to consider how to further bring the fullness of the meaning of the Sacrament of Marriage to those preparing in our diocese.

This "Curriculum for Marriage Preparation" is an important and complementary element in a larger process of initiation of the couple into the Sacrament of Marriage. Before the Marriage Preparation sessions, an initial welcoming encounter of the couple by the parish priest, the deacon or the pastoral minister would have likely taken place. This initial interview provides an opportunity to listen to and receive the couple's understanding, attitudes, beliefs and expectations about marriage in the Church. As well, it is an invaluable time to help those accompanying the couple to start identifying areas that may need specific pastoral attention and guidance (i.e. as freedom to marry and responding to interchurch and interfaith situations) that would be followed-up in other important moments in the process of preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage (i.e. the pre-nuptial inquiry and the preparation for the Marriage Liturgy).

### **WHAT IS MARRIAGE PREPARATION: WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH?**

When considering the task of preparing engaged couples for Marriage, it is important to note that this time of preparation is a key opportunity for evangelization, catechesis, and formation.

“Marriage preparation constitutes a *providential and favourable* period for those oriented toward this Christian sacrament, and a *Kayrós*, i.e., a period in which God calls upon the engaged and helps them discern the vocation to marriage and family life. The engagement period is set within the context of a rich evangelization process.” (PSM 2)

According to The Pontifical Council for the Family’s pastoral document “Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage”, preparation for Marriage can be divided into four stages:

- I. Remote Preparation – lifelong marriage preparation
- II. Proximate Preparation – the year before the wedding
- III. Immediate Preparation – two months before the wedding
- IV. Celebration of Marriage

The curriculum which is being presented concentrates on the stage of Proximate Preparation. Many young people come to the Church at this stage of their lives, looking for help in forming the most important human relationship they will ever have.

"...The changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also society and the Church should be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. (...) The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programmes of marriage preparation, in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favour positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages" (FC 66).

In the Proximate Preparation for Marriage, the Pontifical Council for the Family outlines that the final result should be a clear awareness of the essential characteristics of Christian marriage: that it is **total, exclusive, faithful and fruitful**. Couples should be helped to discern their **vocation of marriage**, accept the **mission to be a sign of God's love** for all the members of the human family, deepen their **personal faith life** and rediscover the **value of the sacraments**. They should be encouraged to live a **life of prayer, self-giving, mutual respect and self-denial**. They should be instructed in the **Natural methods for the regulation of fertility** and **responsible parenthood** and be helped to learn how to preserve and **cultivate marital communication** and how to **overcome the inevitable conjugal "crises"**. There is also a particular emphasis on the fact that marriage preparation is a journey of faith and is an on-going process that does not end at the moment of the celebration of marriage but continues throughout family life. This is why preparation is also a "special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state" (FC 51).

This is by no means a complete summary of what the Church teaches on Marriage and the preparation for the Sacrament, however, it gives us some insight into how to approach the important task of preparing of engaged couples for Catholic Marriage.

#### **Documents Abbreviations**

**FC** John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation [\*Familiaris Consortio\*](#) (November 22, 1981) Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

**PSM** Pontifical Council for the Family, [\*Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage\*](#) (May 13, 1996), Daughters of St. Paul.

# ARCHDIOCESAN CURRICULUM FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION

## TOPICS REQUIRED IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION

### Vocation and Sacrament of Marriage – Foundational Theme

#### Objectives

- Understand the foundations of Catholic Marriage (Total, Exclusive, Faithful, Fruitful)
- Understand the Biblical nature and objectives of the sacrament
- Distinguish between contract and covenant
- See marriage as the reflection of the covenant between Christ and Church
- Understand how the Church community supports marriage
- See God as a partner in marriage
- Understand that their vocation is to make God's love for the Church visible to the world
- Understand the importance of and how to forgive/reconcile
- Be offered the challenge to refrain from sexual relations until marriage as a preparation for discovering / rediscovering the beauty of God's gift of love

#### *Notes to facilitators:*

- *This is an underlying theme to all of the topics in Marriage preparation.*
- *Link this topic with Liturgy (encouraging couples to refer back to this topic as they prepare their Marriage Liturgy with the parish priest, deacon or pastoral minister).*

**Resources:** [Catholic Marriage: An Intimate Community of Life and Love](#) (2011) Novalis.  
[What Does Marriage Add to Your Love?: Pastoral Message to Young Couples On Marriage and Family in the Catholic Church](#) (2008) Concacan, Inc.

### Communication / Problem solving / Conflict resolution

#### Objectives:

- Learn the importance of communication
- Appreciate the value of openness, trust and acceptance
- Discuss the impediments to communication, "unfair fighting" and what not to do
- Learn techniques for effective communication, problem solving and conflict resolution
- See conflict as an opportunity for growth, change and deepened intimacy
- Recognize their own communication styles, strengths and weaknesses
- Understand the communication is more than just words (non-verbal, tone of voice)

## Family of origin / Background

### Objectives:

- Understand how family background influences daily life and shapes each individual
- Examine each other's traditions
- Identify areas of conflict
- Be open to new traditions and practices
- Recognize that differences can be sources of richness or division in marriage
- Identify and discuss expectations of each future spouse regarding marriage, extended family, etc.
- Regarding In-laws: Learn to deal with them and recognize their place in their marriage

## Sexuality / Intimacy

### Objectives:

- Gain understanding and appreciation of sacredness of sexuality and intimacy
- Distinguish positive, healthy sexuality from negative, destructive sexuality
- Study ways to keep passion alive, nurture their love everyday
- Appreciate that sexuality is more than just sex, and love is a decision distinct from lust
- Appreciate the need to understand your mate, his/her needs, and how to create intimacy with him/her
- Understand the relationship between intimacy and sexuality

## Children / Natural Family Planning / Parenting

### Objectives:

- See children as a gift from God
- Learn Church teachings from *Humanae Vitae* on family planning and the importance of children
- Become familiar with available resources for Natural Family Planning (Serena)
- Discuss family size expectations with each other
- Understand responsibilities of parenthood, especially as first teachers and evangelizers of children
- Understand the impact of becoming parents on the couple and their relationship and the importance of nurturing their love for one another, for the sake of their children
- Recognize challenges such as infertility, disabled children and be given the opportunity to discuss such situations as a couple (worksheets)

**Resources:** [Humanae Vitae](#) (1968) Vatican.  
[Liberating Potential](#) (2008) CCCB.  
[Serena Canada / Serena Manitoba](#)  
[Natural Family Planning \(foryourmarriage.org\)](#)

## Spirituality / Faith

Objectives:

- Each partner should explore and understand the importance of faith for themselves and for the other
- Understand that marriage requires acceptance of and respect for faith of each partner
- Understand that faith is a journey (Briefly review the sacraments as signposts on the journey)
- Learn to see family as a domestic Church
- Understand importance of prayer, individual and family as well as participating in the Church community
- Be given the opportunity to experience prayer as a couple
- Explore ways to grow spiritually together after marriage (ex: with another couple, prayer group or community)

### **SUBTOPIC: Interchurch / Interfaith**

- Discussion on how the challenge of different faiths can be a blessing or a source of tension (What makes the difference?)
- Discussion of how children will be educated in faith
- Explore the effect of different faiths on the relationship with extended family
- Explore the common elements of each faith that are shared and can nourish and support the couple (ex: couple prayer/family prayer)

**Resources:** ["Interchurch Marriages: How to Help them Succeed"](#) (1990) St. Anthony Messenger Press

## Abuse and Addictions

Objectives:

- Recognize why this is an important topic in marriage preparation
- Learn to identify what is abuse and what constitute addictions
- Understand the types of abuse (physical, psychological, verbal, emotional, sexual, spiritual, financial)
- Recognize signs and effects
- Recognize that there is hope; that change can happen, but that awareness and seeking help are essential for the victims of addictions and abuse as well as for the abuser/addict.
- Understand the effect of abuse and addictions on the family and the couple (not just the addict's or abuser's problem)
- Be aware of the Canadian Bishops' statement re: not staying in an abusive relationship (["To Live Without Fear". CCCB 1991](#))

*Note to facilitators: Facilitators will provide resources on seeking help for victims of abuse/addictions*

**Resources:** [Marriage Preparation: Why Engaged Couples Need to Consider Abuse](#) Rave Project (Brochure)  
[Helpguide.org: Domestic Abuse and Violence](#)  
[Addictions \(foryourmarriage.org\)](#)

**Help in Manitoba:** [Addictions Foundation of Manitoba](#)  
[Winnipeg Police Service](#) (Brochure)



## Previous Relationships

Objectives:

- Recognize that the experience of previous relationships will carry over into this marriage. Therefore, learning and awareness from the previous relationship (strengths, problems, difficulties) is important
- If applicable, awareness of grieving the previous relationship
- Discuss how marriage will be different from the previous relationship. What is new about it?
- Discuss how each are more ready for marriage in the new relationship

**Resources:** [Deciding To Love – Again \(Diocese of Saskatoon Marriage Task Force\)](#)

## Finances

Objectives:

- Dialogue with partner on priorities and expectations re: money management, decision-making processes
- Appreciate that financial disagreements are frequent and often not really about finances (but other unresolved issues)
- Become comfortable talking about money
- Learn common financial mistakes that couples make
- Acquire awareness of own and partner's financial management styles and literacy
- Become familiar with resources available (financial planners, etc)

*Notes to facilitators:*

- *This topic may be covered mostly by worksheets that may be done outside of the session. The topic of finances should be addressed after having covered the topic of communication.*
- *Resources and formation will be available to facilitators regarding the Church's views on Stewardship.*

## Cohabitation

Objectives:

- The topic will be approached in a non-judgemental way, avoiding condemnation (recommended resources will be offered to facilitators)
- Discuss the differences between the decision to cohabit and to enter into a lifelong commitment in marriage
- Affirm their desire to be married
- Discuss how this relationship has evolved and what each bring to the marriage.

*Note to facilitators: The topic of cohabitation may be covered under the topic of Sacrament or Sexuality, as applicable. Ideally, the topic should be discussed prior to Marriage Preparation.*

**Resources:** [Evenings for the Engaged: Couple Paks](#) (2002) Sadlier. (Pak 4, page 5)  
[Cohabitation \(foryoumarriage.org\)](#)

## **TOPIC REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **Blended families**

(Diocesan workshop with whole family participation, or separate meeting with couples in local parish)

#### Objectives

- Presenters will share on the challenges of their personal experience (or the experience of another couple) in a blended marriage
- Couples will be encouraged to share with one another on the upcoming challenges
  - Discipline
  - Traditions
  - Habits / expectations of the children and of the couple themselves
  - Communication
- Couples will be encouraged to develop new traditions together in their new family

**Resources:** [Instant Families – Just Add Water \(Diocese of Saskatoon Marriage Task Force\)](#)

[References in Marriage Preparation Programs](#)

## **MENTORSHIP IN MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND BEYOND**

In the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, the following suggestions are worth considering in the process of preparing couples for the sacrament of marriage, as well as for the ongoing support of these couples:

- Parishes identify mentor couples from their community that the new couple will be able to relate to.
- The mentorship would begin before or during the period of marriage preparation with the possibility of continuing after marriage.
- The mentor couples would be a link to the parish community and would invite the new couple into a continued relationship with the parish community.
- The mentor couple would get to know the couple (where they are in their life, faith and understanding of marriage).
- They would establish a relationship of trust and would be available for helping the newly married couple if they are in need.
- The mentor couple would also act as a prayer couple for the new couple.

The Archdiocesan office for Marriage and Family proposes to offer formation for couples called by their parishes to become mentors. The following programs/resources exist that may be used by mentor couples in order to prepare couples for marriage or simply journey with them outside of the formal preparation sessions:

Marriage Preparation Mentor Program: “For Better and Forever” ([www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com))

Pre-Marriage Preparation Program (Facilitated by Mentor Couples): “FOCCUS” ([www.foccusinc.com](http://www.foccusinc.com))