

COMBINED LEADER'S GUIDE  
*for Before "I DO" and*  
CATHOLIC *Remarriage*

ANTHONY GARASCIA

*Nihil obstat*: Rev. Augustine DiNoia, O.P.; Mr. Fred Everett, Mrs. Lisa Everett; Rev. Jerome Listecky; Rev. Val Peter; Daniel Scheidt; Prof. Janet Smith; Rev. Peter Uglietto.

*Imprimatur*: Most Rev. John M. D'Arcy  
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*Foreword:*  
*What Three Thousand Couples Taught  
Me About Marriage*

Having been involved with marriage preparation on a diocesan level for over thirty years, I've listened to the hopes and expectations, concerns and disappointments of over three thousand engaged couples. It is an honor to be trusted as an advisor at such an important step in a couple's life. It can also be a burden. As marriage has become more complex and lost some societal support, it's painful to see the breakup of marriages that started out full of hope and promise. It is especially tragic to witness the relationships that could have been saved or painful arguments that could have been handled more constructively had the engaged couple only had better preparation or a trusted mentor to turn to during troubled times. What I've learned from helping prepare over three thousand couples for marriage is that they could surely use programs like *Before "I Do"* and *Catholic Remarriage*.

Currently, I teach a course called "Christian Marriage" to university students. It is encouraging to hear their optimism as they consider how they will resolve conflicts in their own marriages. Unfortunately, it's often also unrealistic. A common response I hear is, "We'll just work it out because we will love and respect each other. We'll compromise." If only love and marriage were that simple. In *Before "I Do"* and *Catholic Remarriage*, Anthony Garascia helps couples challenge the myths of "happily ever after." He doesn't do it in a preachy, moralistic way, however. He does it by asking the right questions. Case studies and well-crafted questions guide the couple to explore their own growing relationship. As couples get to peek into real marriages through the case studies, they can then ask themselves how they would respond if faced with a lessening of romance, an alcoholic spouse, or a conflict over who's pulling their weight in the marriage.

Not only do *Before "I Do"* and *Catholic Remarriage* help engaged or newlywed couples examine the thorny issues of marriage but they also blend the secular with the sacred. Sacramental marriage is not only thinking through what one would do in conflict situations. It must also include the best of

human psychology and awaken or deepen a faith commitment. Garascia introduces couples to the influences that their families of origin, family systems, and each partner's unique personality will have on their marriage. These are sociological and counseling insights that have only recently been applied to marital relationship theory.

As St. Thomas Aquinas said, "Grace builds on nature." So the more couples know about the natural dynamics of human interactions, the better they can enter into a mature marriage relationship. Add to this the wisdom and inspiration of our Catholic heritage, and we pray that the grace will flow into each of the couples who work with *Before "I Do"* or *Catholic Remarriage*. Yes, the total self-giving and unconditional, faithful, lifelong love of marriage is a pretty impossible promise when looked at on solely a human level, but "nothing is impossible with God." Before "I do" and even *after* "I do," couples will find these books grace-filled companions on their journeys together.

Susan Vogt

Author, Speaker, Relationship Coach





# 1

## *Getting Started*

### THE GOALS OF THESE PROGRAMS

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**W**elcome to the *Combined Leader's Guide for Before "I Do" and Catholic Remarriage*, two programs designed to assist priests, deacons, and a variety of lay pastoral ministers who collaborate in various ways in the proximate preparation of engaged couples for marriage. *Before "I Do"* (for those entering marriage for the first time) and *Catholic Remarriage* (for those preparing for remarriage or convalidation following annulment) are, first and foremost, pastoral programs. As such, they do not aim to provide a fully developed theology of marriage, or to make up for whatever may be missing in a couple's catechetical formation and understanding of the faith. They do, however, aim to be resources assisting those working in marriage preparation ministries whom the Rite of Marriage calls to "strengthen and nourish the faith of those who are about to be married, for the sacrament of marriage presupposes and demands faith."<sup>1</sup>

The introduction to the rite further specifies that the priest who will witness a marriage should first offer the couple "a review of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. This may include instruction on the teaching about marriage and the family, on the rites used in the celebration of the sacrament itself, and on the prayers and readings."<sup>2</sup> While the aim of these programs is to assist in this process, they do not claim to be comprehensive treatments of these issues. Because there is a wide range of understanding with regard to the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, the priest or deacon presiding at the wedding needs to assess the couple's need in this area. This leader's guide also presumes that the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage will engage the couple with planning the wedding liturgy itself. Numerous resources are available for liturgy planning, including *Together for Life* (also available from Ave Maria Press).

The Committee on Marriage and Family Life at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops began the National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage in 2005. The Initiative seeks to bring Catholic tradition about the meaning and value of married life into dialogue with contemporary needs. As the Initiative was being considered, Bishop J. Kevin Boland, chair of the Committee on Marriage and Family Life, cited these recent statistics on marriage in the United States.

- More than 80% of adults say that having a good marriage is absolutely necessary for them to consider their life a success (Family Research Council).
- There was a 48% drop in Church-recorded marriages between 1984 and 2004, according to the 2004 Official Catholic Directory.
- During that same period, the annual rate of all marriages in the U. S. declined by 24% (National Center for Health Statistics).
- The median age of a first marriage is twenty-five for women and twenty-seven for men (National Marriage Project).
- For couples marrying today, the lifetime probability of divorce remains close to 50% (National Marriage Project).
- Being well educated, having a decent income, coming from an intact family, being religiously observant, and marrying after age twenty-five without having a baby first are all factors that lower one's chances of divorce to less than 50% (National Marriage Project).
- On average, people who end their first marriage do so in their early thirties (Barna Group Research Report).
- Among all adults who have been married, 35% have also been divorced. Of those who have divorced, 18% have done so more than once (Barna Group Research Report).
- Among the baby-boom generation, born between 1946 and 1960, 46% have already lived through divorce at least once (Barna Group Research Report).
- The number of annulment cases brought to diocesan and regional tribunals worldwide in 2002 was 54,247. Of this



number, the total in the United States was 30,845 (Vatican Statistical Yearbook of the Catholic Church).

- Catholics are still less likely to get divorced than Protestants, by 25% to 39% (Barna Group Research Report).
- Over 80% of those seeking to be married in the Catholic Church in the United States (over 200,000 annually) participate in a marriage preparation program (USCCB surveys).

Obviously, as a priest, deacon, or lay pastoral minister charged with helping couples prepare for marriage, you face an immense task. In his 1981 apostolic exhortation *On the Family*, Pope John Paul II called the Church to provide greater pastoral care for those preparing for marriage:

The Church must therefore promote better and more extensive programs of marriage preparation in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages.<sup>3</sup>

The primary aim of *Before “I Do”* and *Catholic Remarriage* is to help engaged couples prepare for the commitment and responsibilities that the sacrament of marriage entails. This *Combined Leader’s Guide* will help you, as a marriage preparation minister, learn how to make the best use of the materials contained in the couples’ workbooks.

## BEFORE “I DO”

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The approach of this program is primarily pastoral. *Before “I Do”* attempts to tap into the excitement and enthusiasm already present in the engaged couple and to focus that energy into building a spiritual foundation for marriage, a foundation that will last. It seeks to constantly remind couples that marriage is more than the wedding—that it is a lived reality embedded in the mystery of the triune God who calls us to the fullness of life in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Three aspects comprise this pastoral approach to marriage preparation. These three areas are built upon the latest research into the most effective marriage preparation programs. They are:

### *1. Facilitation of Insight and Awareness*

The program attempts to facilitate a process whereby the engaged couple gains insight into the influences that have shaped the two of them through the years, and how these influences affect the way they interact with each other in the present. Many engaged couples already come into marriage preparation with a good amount of energy and insight. In this case the task is to validate and affirm the energy and awareness already present in the engaged couples. However, as the saying goes, "love is blind." Engaged couples don't always see everything about how they interact and are often grateful when they learn something important about themselves in the course of their preparation.

### *2. Relational Skills*

Insight into oneself is often sufficient to initiate change and to foster a deeper commitment to the process of building a mature relationship. However, actual skill building is also an essential component, especially in the areas of communication and conflict resolution. Many engaged and married couples have underdeveloped skills in this area or have learned unhealthy and harmful ways of communication from their families of origin. These unhealthy patterns can block the development of a mature relationship, and in the extreme lead to the downfall of the marriage.

### *3. Placing Spirituality as a Significant Component to Marriage Preparation*

This program is built around the belief that an understanding of and a commitment to grow in a Catholic Christian spirituality are essential for a lasting marriage. As a result, each of the six sessions in this program includes a section on the spirituality of marriage. Further, sessions 2 through 6 begin with a reflection on some dimension of the sacramentality of marriage. A wholehearted, positive embrace of the spirituality of Catholic marriage can be a positive and efficacious reality for the engaged couple. Too often we downplay the wisdom of our tradition because one of the engaged parties is a member of another Christian denomination, or because we are a little embarrassed to talk about our faith. As this discomfort fades, an engaged couple will begin to expect to talk about spirituality and will even miss this aspect if it is not included.

## THE DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM

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This program is written for two different types of implementation, the couple-to-couple approach and the group preparation approach. While both approaches have the same goals, their methodologies vary enough so as to call for separate implementation notes. Both approaches are given fuller treatment below.

### *1. The Couple-to-Couple Approach*

In this model, the engaged couple is assigned to a married couple in the parish or other pastoral setting (e.g., campus ministry). The married couple is often referred to as the **lead couple**, as this couple will take leadership in facilitating the interaction between the engaged couple and themselves. Once assigned, the lead couple makes contact with the engaged couple and sets up the first appointment or sessions.

Sessions are usually held in the lead couple's home, although they may sometimes be scheduled at a more neutral site like a parish office. The benefit of meeting in the lead couple's home is that the engaged couple gets to see firsthand the workings of an established household with all of its uniqueness. It can be important, for instance, for an engaged couple to witness firsthand how the lead couple handles things like bedtime for their own children.

Most couple-to-couple programs are four to six sessions in length, with individual sessions taking from ninety minutes to two hours. The benefits to this type of an approach are obvious: the engaged couple gets a one-on-one opportunity to reflect on how they have prepared for marriage thus far and an opportunity to continue the preparation over the next four to six sessions. The engaged couple also has the opportunity of learning from the experiences of the married couple. It often happens that many engaged couples develop close ties with their lead couple, and it is not unusual for them to stay in touch months and sometimes years after their wedding date.

The disadvantages of a couple-to-couple approach are few. The most serious drawback to this type of program occurs when either the right "chemistry" does not occur between the engaged and lead couples or when one member (or both) of the engaged couple comes into the program resistant

or resentful at having to participate. These issues will be addressed in chapter 4 of this manual.

## 2. *The Group Approach*

This approach calls for several or even many engaged couples to come and participate in a program designed to provide both private and group reflection on the topic of marriage. In this approach, a **marriage preparation team** usually takes responsibility for the planning and implementation of the day. Some members of the team may have specific responsibilities such as giving talks, while others may serve as facilitators of the small group reflection.

The length of the program varies with each one’s objectives. Some programs cover eight to ten hours in a day or weekend, while others cover much more time over a series of gatherings. The second approach allows for more group process where engaged couples tell stories and get to meet other couples with similar interests and goals.

Some group programs include a presentation on a given topic by a guest speaker, or speakers. Thus, if the topic for the evening were conflict, it would be expected that someone—usually a married couple—would make a presentation on the topic. The presentation would cover two aspects: personal sharing on how the couple dealt with the topic in their own lives and practical information concerning the topic. In the case of the topic of conflict, the participants would receive some useful hints about how to handle conflict in their own relationship.

One of the benefits of a group program is the rapport that can develop between the engaged couples who participate in the program. In this setting, team members can intentionally plan opportunities for mixing and sharing between the couples with the expectation that interpersonal learning will occur. The fact that everyone is united around the common task of preparing for marriage also creates a sense of camaraderie that can be utilized by the team.

This approach can have shortcomings, especially if the group of participants is too large and the leadership team does not have the necessary leadership skills. Then the group process will hinder, not facilitate, rapport between couples. Teams need especially to try to be aware of designing group processes that match the maturity and age level of the participants. While

# 4

## *Special Pastoral Issues*

### INTERFAITH AND MIXED MARRIAGES

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**R**ecent statistics indicate that about 40 percent of American Catholics marry someone from a different religious affiliation.<sup>20</sup> What this means for those conducting a marriage prep program is that traditional and familiar religious language and concepts cannot be presumed.

Religious differences can also be a source of conflict in a marriage, especially if the question of the religious upbringing of children is unresolved.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it behooves the couple to discuss openly their expectations concerning how it is they will resolve this potential source of tension.

The influence of the marriage prep program in assisting engaged couples to think through the differences in their religious views and/or practices is often quite significant. Lead couples and team members can go a long way toward modeling acceptance of differences and enthusiasm for making spirituality a significant aspect of the early marriage commitment.

When working with a couple in this situation keep in mind the following:

*1. Don't apologize for your own faith.*

A person from another religious tradition might come to the sessions with a mixture of curiosity and indifference. If he or she witnesses team members and lead couples downplaying their own Catholic experience, then this person could form the impression that Catholicism is not very important.

*2. Don't oversell the Catholic experience either.*

Know your faith and be comfortable in expressing how it “works” for you by solving the bigger problems of meaning and belonging in your life. Keep in mind that you are modeling a certain way of being religious even though you might not be intentional about it.

3. *Be ready to give good reasons why anyone might be interested in exploring Catholicism.*

A marriage prep program can be looked at as another way of evangelizing, that is, bringing the good news to people. If there are any inquiries about the Catholic Church, be ready to refer the couple to the local parish's catechumenate program. A young couple that participates in this type of program receives, in many respects, the best form of preparation for marriage.

4. *Without trying to scare the couple, be ready to discuss with them the facts of marriages between people of different backgrounds.*

Research has shown that in 50 percent of these marriages one spouse converts to the other's religion; that the mother has a stronger influence on the children's religious identification, but that the father's participation is important for the religious development of sons; and that there is a slightly higher divorce rate in marriages between people of different religious affiliations.<sup>22</sup>

5. *Regardless of the question of where the two will worship, stress with the couple the importance of developing a spirituality of marriage.*

This involves, in part, an attitude that our lives are interconnected in a web of communities, that all humans share a common bond, and that a transcendent force is somehow at work in the cosmos and in our lives. Ask the couple to seriously consider how it is they intend to celebrate and ritualize the important aspects of their lives, and whether religion and spirituality have any place in that task. For example, talk with them about which holidays they will celebrate and how, how they will mark births and deaths, and how they will respond to life's crises like a serious illness or accident.

## COHABITATION

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Engaged couples living together before marriage present a unique and significant pastoral challenge to anyone involved in the ministry of marriage preparation. About 50 percent of couples seeking marriage in the Church are already living together under one roof.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops defines cohabitation as a couple who have been living together at least four nights a week for an extended period of time, where a commitment to each other exists, and

where there is some recognition that the couple form a family or household.<sup>23</sup> Many people do not use the term “cohabitation” but use the term “living together” to describe a situation where there is a commitment to share economic and household resources, and where the commitment includes a serious level of emotional and sexual sharing.

In the culture of the 1960s, the attitude toward premarital sex and cohabitation was rather carefree. If it wasn’t “harmful,” an action was deemed permissible, and many people in authority positions outside the Church saw no harm in the choice of a couple to live together before marriage. The Church, of course, did not share this view.

Although many in our culture understand and agree with the Church’s teaching on the immorality of sexual intercourse before marriage, this teaching is far from clear to all. Because it is clearly countercultural, many find it difficult to embrace. Yet the Church holds firm to its teaching. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that sex outside marriage is “gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children” (CCC, 2353).

In addition to the Church’s convictions, we also have the benefit of a generation of research on the effects of cohabitation. Longitudinal statistical pools of information suggest that divorce rates among couples who lived together before marriage are higher than among couples who did not live together. The reasons for this appear to be found in the very teaching on marriage that the Church has been expounding throughout its long history.

Put succinctly, a lasting marriage commitment requires a mature freedom where a person can speak honestly and forthrightly with his or her partner about the concerns and tensions of the day. Anything that limits this freedom places hidden “strings” on the relationship that implicitly state: “If you raise this issue I might not stick around.” The foundational issues, because they have the greatest potential for conflict, often do not get the attention they deserve. One study found that couples who lived together tended to avoid issues such as finances, careers, children, and the like because of the potential negative impact on the relationship.<sup>24</sup>

Thus we can see that cohabitation can actually cause harm to the marriage bond down the line, especially if a deep trust and confidence in the permanence of the relationship has not been formed. A marriage built on



withholding of trust and self-surrender does not live up to the ideals of Christ put forth by the Church. There is good reason to be concerned about a couple who lives together.

### *A Pastoral Approach to Cohabitation*

As in any pastoral dilemma the person of Jesus needs to be central in finding appropriate solutions. We can turn here to the story "The Woman at the Well" (Jn 4:4–42) for developing an approach that can be helpful. In this story we find Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The two engage in a dialogue that sometimes appears to be a sparring match. At one point Jesus tells the woman to "go call your husband and come back" (Jn 4:16). When she replies that she doesn't have a husband, Jesus confronts her honestly and tells her that she is correct, that she has had five previous husbands, and that the man she is living with now is not her husband. As she becomes aware that this is a man she cannot manipulate, this confrontation becomes the beginning of a deeper conversion for the woman.

Thus, we find that Jesus focuses on being honest about what is happening and on conversion. These two points can become the central strategy for anyone working with preparing an engaged couple for marriage.

### *Honesty and Conversion*

It does no good for anyone to deny that a couple is living together. The most likely reason for an engaged couple to deny this is fear that they will be refused marriage. This sometimes leads them to a deception of the priest, deacon, or lay minister doing initial preparation work with them. Most seasoned priests, deacons, and pastoral ministers know from experience that moving the couple beyond fear of judgment and rejection leads to a much deeper dialogue about the consequences of cohabitation. Only with such a dialogue, guided by God's grace, can the couple be led to carefully reconsider their situation.

Most dioceses have a set of policies and procedures concerning the issue of cohabitation about which the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister of the parish should know. The lead couple or team member who encounters the issue should start first at the parish in which the wedding will take place, in discovering what approach to take. In many cases the priest, deacon, or pastoral minister has already become aware of a couple's cohabitation.



*Suggested Outline***SESSION ONE: BUILDING YOUR MARRIAGE ON A SOUND FOUNDATION**

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Total suggested time: 2 hours, 55 minutes to 3 hours, 5 minutes

*Comment:* Because of time constraints, you may need to allow less time for some of the sections. Another possibility is to leave a section for the couple to do at home on their own. This will become a necessity if you plan sessions that run for just two hours. For instance, you may choose not to do a section in favor of having a group discussion on one of the case studies. It is recommended that you give enough time for the material on the spirituality of marriage, even if you do not cover all of the material.

1. *Welcome and Greeting of Couples (5 min.)*

2. *Opening Prayer and Overview of Program (10 min.)*

**Group Program:** Use the prayers in the couple’s book or have a team member design a prayer service.

**Couple-to-Couple:** Use one of the prayers in the back of the book, a memorized prayer such as the Our Father, or a spontaneous prayer offered by either member of the lead couple.

3. *Sections 1 & 2: Energy, Excitement, & Gifts We Give (15 min.)*

**Group Program:** Have the couples spend time going through each section, answering questions. Then, have each couple pair with another. Each person is to share his or her answer to one item from each section.

**Couple-to-Couple:** Give the couple time to complete the sections; then ask them to respond to each question one by one or only to the questions that interest them.

#### 4. Sections 3 & 4: *Your Expectations & Great Expectations (15 min.)*

**Group Program:** Have the couples do the exercise; then fiancés are to share with each other their responses. The positive expectations that the Church has for an engaged couple's marriage can be stressed in the talk later in the program.

**Couple-to-Couple:** Have the couple do the exercise on their own expectations. Feel free to raise the issue of the Church's expectation for their happiness and lasting commitment. This might be a good time to stress the covenant relationship that frames the marriage commitment. (See the section "A Sacred Covenant, a Holy Sacrament" on pp. 43–46)

*Comment:* This is a good time to break the stereotype of the Church as the stern parent ready to reprimand the person who steps out of line. Emphasize with the couple(s) the high hopes and earnest prayer for joy and happiness that the Church has for them. In the group program this can be addressed through the presentation/"witness talk"; in the couple-to-couple program this can be addressed in the normal course of the conversation.

#### 5. Section 5: *Realistic Expectations? (30 min.)*

**Group Program:** Have the couples go through these expectations and fill out their responses. Then, divide them into small groups of no more than six people to a group. Ask each person to share a response to at least one question to which he or she responded.

When dividing couples into small groups, you may want to review the Rules for Simple Sharing. Also, the issue of unrealistic expectations can be addressed in a presentation or "witness talk."

A budget sheet is provided in conjunction with this section for couples to do on their own.

**Couple-to-Couple:** After the couple finishes this section, allow them to go through the expectations at a leisurely pace. Make sure that your personal disclosures from your own marriage facilitate the sharing of the engaged couple. It is appropriate and helpful to talk about how you dealt with your own unrealistic expectations, but be careful to allow the engaged couple to speak, too. If they are eager and excited to share, try to keep them talking.

A budget sheet is provided in conjunction with this section for couples to do on their own.

*Comment:* Expectations can create ambivalence on the part of a couple getting married. On the one hand, expectations tell us something about the future we want; on the other hand they can become an obligation that we rebel against. As the couple(s) share(s) on this material, be sensitive to any tension surrounding expectations that one or both feel are unattainable or unrealistic. This may be harder to monitor in a group format, but if it does occur, be ready to offer any couple discreet but appropriate counsel. Often, couples need to be reminded that tension over expectations is a normal part of a committed relationship. Look for especially troublesome expectations such as the expectation that marriage will change another's drinking or harmful conflict resolution style (name-calling, hitting, etc.). These call for a different sort of intervention. (See the section "Confidentiality," pp. 60–64)

The desire to change one's spouse is perhaps the biggest stumbling block that trips up a couple early in marriage. It is especially important to address the expectations of each spouse in this area.

Also, be sensitive to how a couple appears to handle conflict. Some of this may begin to surface in the first session. Don't be surprised when you discover that some couples are more open to dealing with anger and conflict. "Anger" and "conflict" are two words that many people don't connect to a healthy marriage. Yet research indicates that as anger and conflict are dealt with and resolved, a marriage is made stronger. It is when anger and conflict are avoided and replayed again and again that real difficulty is created.

#### 6. *Speaker/"Witness Talk" (15 min.)*

**Group Program:** This is a good place to have a "witness talk" from someone who has had to adjust his or her expectations in the course of a marriage. This topic can be joined with the notion of "covenant relationship" where there exist both realistic and unrealistic expectations. It is best to make such a talk as experiential as possible while placing stress on how spirituality helped him or her adjust to the reality of being married. It would be ideal if a couple could make this presentation, with each spouse briefly offering his or her own perspective.

7. *Break, Group Program Only (10 min. maximum)*

8. *Sections 6 & 7: Building on Solid Ground & Twelve Foundational Factors (40 min.)*

**Group Program:** This next section is crucial in helping the engaged couple understand that spirituality is holistic, that it includes the entire person. Encourage the couple to see their own religious beliefs and practices as extending into their everyday workweek, their time alone, and their time with friends. Have the couples complete this section in quiet. Then send each engaged couple away to talk privately with each other. Have them report back after thirty minutes.

**Couple-to-Couple:** Think carefully about how you might present the idea of a spirituality of married life in a positive and interesting way. Where appropriate, speak about your experience concerning what your own faith and spirituality have meant to your marriage. Also, in your own marriage, which foundational factors were fully present at the time of your marriage and which ones did you need to develop through the course of your marriage?

*Comment:* You may want to facilitate discussion by asking the couple to identify three or four foundational factors that they have either not thought about or that impress them as especially important.

Another approach if time is running short is to have the couple(s) simply check the factors where they think they are doing well, and put a minus sign next to those factors where they wish to improve. You can then encourage the couple(s) to look at the questions sometime in the following week.

9. *Case Study (20 min.)*

**Group Program:** Divide the couples into small groups of not more than six people. Assign them one of the case studies and ask them to read it, answer the questions, and then discuss the case.

**Couple-to-Couple:** Try to leave enough time to discuss at least one of the case studies. Have the couple read through the other case study and answer the related questions during the next week.

# 7

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## *Preparing for Second Marriage or Convalidation Using*

### Catholic Remarriage: A Workbook for Couples

**A**s a priest, deacon, or LEM working in marriage preparation ministry, you know the complexity of the task at hand when you assist couples in which one or both partners have been previously married. Working with people who have endured the heartache of divorce or the death of a spouse demands great pastoral sensitivity. Like all couples preparing for marriage, these men and women deserve the best pastoral care that the Church has to offer as they prepare for remarriage or convalidation.

In its most common form, convalidation is when a civilly married couple renews their consent (marriage vows) in the presence of the Church's minister, thereby entering into a valid Christian (or sacramental) marriage. Sometimes this is a very simple and private event. Other times, a couple chooses a more public celebration. Occasionally a marriage is validated by sanation. This is done by the action of a bishop or the Holy See, or the proper delegate of either. Because sanation does not require the renewal of consent by either party, you will not likely be working with couples utilizing this process.

As you know, anyone who is preparing for a second marriage or convalidation in the Roman Catholic Church must receive a declaration of nullity for the previous marriage from a diocesan tribunal before the second marriage or the convalidation can take place. This declaration of nullity is simply a statement acknowledging that the first marriage was somehow flawed at its inception. What appeared to be a valid Christian marriage, in fact, was not. Increasingly, annulment comes with a requirement that the person

receiving it must participate in some form of pastoral counseling prior to contracting a second marriage or convalidation in the Church.

The couples you work with in these situations present a wide range of circumstances and needs. Many are already living together, some for many years. Other couples are already well into a second civil marriage and now seek convalidation in the Church. Still other couples will have one partner preparing for a second marriage while the other partner prepares for his or her first marriage. Similarly, many couples seek convalidation of an already well-established civil marriage that is a first for one partner while a second for the other. Yet other couples have one partner who has been divorced and the other widowed. Assisting all these couples, with their wide array of circumstances and needs is complicated at best. At worst, it is dizzying and exhausting. This section on using *Catholic Remarriage: A Workbook for Couples* is meant to help you.

## USING THIS RESOURCE

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*Catholic Remarriage* is a resource for pastoral counseling and so differs significantly from other marriage preparation resources. It is meant to assist you in your work, enhancing your effort, not comprising the whole of it. The first five chapters of this *Combined Leader's Guide* provide many useful ideas about how to work with a couple, dealing with resistance, and other issues of being a good facilitator. The chapters suggest how to greet the couple, what to expect, and how to keep sessions flowing. I urge you to consult these early chapters as you work with the following material.

*Catholic Remarriage* can be used by you as an individual pastoral minister or in a well-developed and well-supervised couple-to-couple program. While the workbook is written with individual couples in mind, you may find it beneficial to adapt some of the chapters and exercises for use in small groups of two or more couples with similar circumstances. **Use the book in a flexible manner, picking and choosing which sections to use with each couple or small group and in which order.** Consider it raw material that you can custom fit according to the particular needs of individual couples. Most of the exercises should be completed by each partner individually and then discussed together with you.

The offerings of this book flow from assessing the relationship, to identifying problem areas, to addressing specific problems couples might be facing. Not all couples will benefit from each chapter, nor from every exercise within any given chapter. Again, it will fall largely to you to determine how much of the material to use and when to use it. For instance, a couple that has been married for thirteen years and exhibits excellent communication skills will have very different needs than a couple preparing to begin what will be a second marriage for both of the partners. A couple for whom the coming marriage is a first for one partner and a second for the other may need yet a different set of materials or at least different emphases. Many couples will benefit from working through all the chapters, no matter what their situation. The chapters are arranged as follows:

*1. Christian Marriage: Our Context and Our Goal*

The opening chapter sets the stage for all the work of this book. Because the goal here is for a couple to enter and be successful at Christian marriage, it is important to talk about just what that means. The chapter addresses marriage as a sacramental covenant and helps the couple to explore together, with you, just how they can appropriate that meaning in their relationship.

*2. Assessing Your Relationship*

This chapter allows a couple to look at what went wrong in a previous marriage and identify any areas where closure still needs to be worked out. At the same time, the chapter assesses the strengths and weaknesses of a couple concerning communication and conflict resolution. At the end of the chapter, both you and the couple should have a good idea of what areas require additional attention.

*3. Creating Relationship Resiliency*

This chapter looks at the present relationship of the couple and takes each partner through a process of understanding how solid, healthy relationships are built and sustained. At the same time, the couple will be able to understand if there are any outstanding challenges facing them concerning how resilient their present relationship is.

*4. Communicating and Negotiating Effectively*

This chapter takes the couple through a process of understanding how to communicate better, especially when there is tension. It helps them to de-



velop skills for negotiating fairly in order to get their individual and shared needs met.

#### *5. Dealing With Conflict*

This chapter will explore with the couple how each partner approaches conflict. It also looks at the gifts, challenges, and pitfalls of their approach, and how they might be able to manage conflict more successfully.

#### *6. Parenting in Blended Families*

This chapter will allow couples who have children to explore the challenges and promises of a blended family as well as the skills and efforts needed in parenting with former spouses.

#### *7. Cultivating a Forgiving Spirit*

This is a chapter on spirituality, and one that may be greatly needed by your couple. Having endured the breakup of a marriage, one or both of the partners may quite possibly experience a difficult time with trust and forgiveness. This chapter can assist in the process of letting go and moving on.

#### *8. Growing Into a Mature Spirituality*

This chapter emphasizes how important spirituality is in maintaining a mature relationship. It asks the couple to consider some themes that link them with the wider Church.

Each session concludes with a case illustration and a section on spirituality. The case illustrations are presented with the hope that the couple will be able to further explore any unresolved issues that face them by looking at another couple's situation. A mature spirituality is a very important characteristic to any successful marriage, and it is important that the couple takes responsibility for it together.