

Together in God's Image

INTRODUCTION

“Together in God's Image” is a marriage preparation program based on the Catholic understanding of marriage as sacrament. In Catholic theology, marriage is a sign of the Holy Trinity. God created us, male and female, in His image and the married couple is a communion of persons, as the Holy Trinity is a communion of persons. Marriage is also a visible sign of Christ's relationship with the Church. This program presents an overview of this sacramental understanding of marriage and then presents practical ways in which the married couple can live as a sign of the Trinity and of Jesus and the Church in the areas of communication, sexuality, and stewardship.

In the *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB Publishing, 2005), the United States Bishops identify several key areas that should be addressed in preparation for Christian marriage (*NDC*, 36). Specifically, the directory states that “dioceses and parishes should present catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony that:

- Encourages the care and concern of the whole Christian community for married couples by public recognition of couples planning marriage, modeling by couples in successful marriages, and support of couples in challenged marriages
- Stresses marriage as a distinct and dignified vocation in the Church
- Explains the effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony: the establishment of a perpetual and exclusive bond between the spouses that is sealed by God himself, the perfection of the mutually exclusive and permanent love of the couple, the strengthening of their indissoluble unity, and the experience of a foretaste of the Kingdom of God
- Encourages marriages within the Catholic faith and explains why this is desirable (the Church requires marriage within the Catholic faith; permission or a dispensation from the bishop is necessary for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic or an un-baptized person, respectively)
- Teaches that marriage is a covenant of love in which God participates as an active member
- Acknowledges that it is in the love and struggles a couple attains the holiness of their vocation
- Teaches that in Christian marriage the unity of the couple is a unity founded in an equal personal dignity and expressed in an unreserved mutuality of self-giving
- Teaches that the family is the first and essential center of faithful living, the domestic Church
- Teaches that the home is the first school of Christian life and human enrichment
- Teaches that a couple's marriage in Christ is a sacred relationship that is supported for the length of their lives by the grace to love each other with the love Christ has for the Church
- Teaches that fidelity, indissolubility, and openness to children are essential to Christian marriage
- Teaches that Christian marriage is for the mutual support of the spouses, their growth in love, and the procreation and education of their children
- Includes a clear presentation of the Church's teaching on the morally acceptable methods of regulating birth and the immorality of artificial birth control, of sterilization for that purpose, and of abortion
- Emphasizes their personal responsibility to protect the human life that the co-create with God from the moment of conception to natural death
- Includes a clear presentation of the Church's teaching on mixed and inter-religious marriages
- Includes instruction on the rite of the sacrament
- Teaches that the couple themselves are the ministers of the sacrament and that their consent should be publicly exchanged in their vows before a priest or deacon (or a witness authorized by the Church) and two other witnesses, ideally in the presence of an assembly of the faithful
- Assists the couple in deepening their understanding of the nature of Christian marriage as a covenant between a man and a woman whereby the spouses establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life that is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children” (pp. 143-144).