

Clergy Tool Kit for
www.OnlineMarriagePreparation.com
and
“The Greatest Is Love: Catholic Edition”

This course is designed by Rev. Dr. Frank Nelson, pastor and marriage educator, and created for engaged couples preparing for marriage. The strategies offered will be useful for Marriage and Family Life Directors at the diocesan level, local priests, deacons, and sponsor/mentor couples who work with engaged couples. Rev. Dr. Nelson has worked extensively with Catholic churches over the past four years to create this program.

The relatively small amount of time we spend assisting couples as they prepare for marriage is a very wise investment of time, not only an investment in their future, but also, in the future of the church and community. Strong marriages and families are the lifeblood of healthy, growing churches.

And so, it is my great privilege to come alongside you and to assist in one of the most important ministries of the church – preparing engaged couples for marriage in the Catholic Church. During this course couples will learn effective communication skills and non-defensive, conflict resolution strategies. They will deepen their love and understanding, and their chances for success in marriage will be increased. They will have grown in their understanding of the meaning of the vocation and sacrament of marriage and be introduced to the importance of Natural Family Planning. This course offers couples a comprehensive 12-hour marriage preparation experience, equivalent to a weekend retreat.

Depending on your situation and need, you can 1) Refer couples to the online eCourse or 2) Order *The Greatest Is Love: Catholic Edition for Engaged Couples* and use the ten guided conversations in this book to enhance your strategy for guiding couples through the process of marriage preparation, whether you're working with one couple or hundreds of couples.

OPTION ONE: Refer couples to
www.OnlineMarriagePreparation.com

When you refer couples to this website, they will be able to purchase an access code offering them the completely downloadable Roman Catholic eCourse. During the course they will complete 10 guided conversations and take an online assessment tool created by Life Innovations called the *Couple CheckUp*. Three teaching videos with Rev. Dr. Nelson will guide the couples step-by-step through the course. Catholic teaching about marriage is integrated throughout the course. They also, develop a better understanding of the “Sacrament of Marriage” as they listen to a video presentation by Father Tom Walker. Pat and Kenna Millea do an outstanding job of introducing couples to the beauty of Natural Family Planning in another teaching video.

What are the advantages to couples who use the online course?

1. Engaged couples are able to complete the course in the privacy of their own home. Some couples are hesitant to meet with a “stranger” or pastor to discuss the intimate parts of their relationships, but they are open and eager to have these talks in the privacy of their own home.
2. Couples can use their laptops, desktops or mobile devices to fill out the guided conversations. Links to Rev. Dr. Nelson’s teaching videos guide couples, step-by-step, through the course.
3. Couples learn to communicate by doing an extensive amount of communicating. The guided conversations make it easy for couples to enjoy really good talks.
4. Couples receive the benefit of an online marriage inventory called the *Couple CheckUp* created by Life Innovations, the same company that offers the *Prepare-Enrich* Inventory.
5. Couples expand their understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage and are also introduced to Natural Family Planning.
6. Couples can follow their own schedule and complete the course in a week or stretch it out over two or more months (preferred). No appointments are necessary, although deacons, priests and sponsor/mentor couples will want to set an appointment with each couple after they have completed the eCourse to review what they have learned as well as to take time to prepare for their wedding ceremony.
7. Couples who live in separate cities can enjoy their conversations by phone.
8. During the course couples will complete 10 guided conversations and an online assessment provided by Prepare-Enrich called the Couple CheckUp. In some states this qualifies them to receive a discount on the cost of their marriage license.
9. Couples pay only \$95 for a course that Rev. Dr. Nelson now offers for \$295.

If this is online, what is the involvement of a priest, deacon or mentor/sponsor couple?

Your first involvement will be to require couples to complete the course, and if possible, 6-12 months before their wedding day. Some couples will need the motivation of knowing that you expect them to complete this marriage preparation course. After they do complete it, they will always thank you for the experience you offered to them. It is important that you monitor their work by asking them to send to you the saved conversations they have completed as attachments to emails. Plan to take a few minutes to review their work. **Seeing a couple’s completed work and reviewing their inventory will do three important things:**

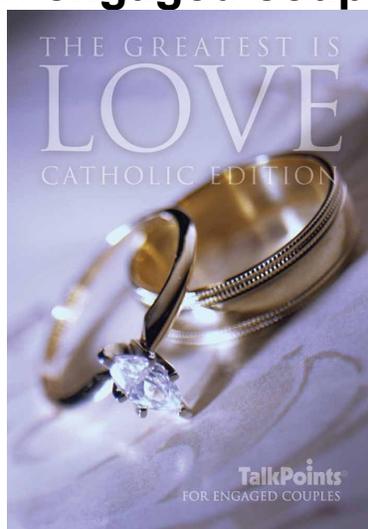
- 1) It will motivate the couple to complete the work knowing that you are expecting to see their work;
- 2) It will demonstrate to you that they have completed the required course work;
- 3) It will help you to get to know the couple by reviewing the work they have done. This will better prepare you to work with them in personalizing their wedding ceremony.

Also, plan to require your couples to take the online inventory at www.CoupleCheckUp.com. Ask them to send you a copy of the report that comes back to them from Life Innovations. If you are certified to administer the Prepare-Enrich inventory, FOCCUS, or another inventory, it’s appropriate to use a different inventory. Note that going over the results of an inventory is not enough to replace the scope and value of this eCourse, but the inventory certainly expands the experience couples have.

What are some advantages of this eCourse to you?

1. This approach helps you to manage your time wisely and helps you balance the many demands of ministry with the demands of your personal life. You will have a more effective and comprehensive ministry to engaged couples, but spend less time doing it.
2. You can still be very involved with couples as you review their work and meet with them to plan for the ceremony.
3. Couples will thank you and the church for offering an excellent experience to them. They will see your church and your ministry as relevant to their lives, and be more likely to choose your church as their place of worship and service.
4. There is no dollar cost to you or the church.

OPTION TWO: Incorporate the use of *The Greatest Is Love: Catholic Edition* into your present ministry with engaged couples.



Preview pages of this resource at www.talkpoints.com.

The following step-by-step, detailed process is a time-tested, effective way to prepare engaged couples for marriage. By combining the insights from the Prepare-Enrich inventory with the ten guided conversations from *The Greatest Is Love: Catholic Edition*, you will be offering a comprehensive and enjoyable pre-marital education to couples, and you will consistently receive positive feedback from the couples you work with. Priests, deacons and prepare/mentor couples can utilize the following guide in their work with couples.

Plan to have at least three, 1 ½ - 2 hour meetings with each couple.

The First Meeting: Introduce the Conversation “Before We Say ‘I Do.’”

Step 1) Get acquainted with your couple -- how they met, the proposal story, their wedding plans. Tell a little about yourself, family and ministry. Next, go over the Table of Contents on page 1 to introduce the topics that will be covered during this course. Ask one of them to put checkmarks next to “Introduction,” “Before We Say ‘I Do,’” “Faith,” “Issues,” and “Rules for Resolving Conflicts, the conversations that will be covered during your three meetings. The other 7 conversations will be completed as homework

between each of the three meetings. Let the couple know, also, that they will be completing an online inventory called *Prepare-Enrich* in between the first and second meeting. You must be certified to administer *Prepare-Enrich*. You now have the option of offering the *Couple CheckUp* inventory at www.CoupleCheckUp.com, and for this you do not need to be certified.

2) Review the Introduction on pages 2-6. (Carefully, discuss the page about the Sacrament, as well as, the other pages introducing this book and the value of guided conversations.)

3) Invite the couple to follow the “he reads” and “she reads” prompts as they read through the Introduction on page 8. Couples will then remove the two perforated talk sheets from the book. Offer them a place to write and plenty of time to complete both sides of the talk sheet. One will usually finish writing before the other, so use the two “Background” pages at the back of the book and have the one who finishes first begin filling out his/her background information. Collect these at the end of your meeting.

4) When they are both done writing, invite them to sit face-to-face with their knees touching and hold hands as they take turns sharing responses from their talk sheets. (Your role is to listen and not to interrupt or comment until they have finished their conversation.)

5) After their conversation, affirm and congratulate them for the love that has been evident in their conversation.

6) Go over their assignment, which is to complete the next three conversations in the book (“Our Parents,” “Our Love Life,” and “Leisure and Work”) and complete the *Prepare-Enrich* online, FOCCUS, or the inventory you are trained to use. Only certified educators may use the *Prepare-Enrich* inventory. (However, the inventory at www.CoupleCheckUp.com can be accessed by anyone, and that inventory is an excellent option.) Give some simple instructions to let them know how to take the inventory, and if they will be paying for the inventory, let them know the cost. Let your couple know that during session two you will review with them the report from the pre-marriage inventory.

The Second Meeting: “Faith”

Receive the three conversations your couple has completed, and during this session, take time to review their work. During this meeting communicate the importance of faith for couples, but avoid communicating that you have an agenda for what they ought to believe and how they need to practice faith in their marriage. At this point the goal is to have them talk with each other about what they do think and believe. After they have filled out the Faith conversation and completed their conversation, affirm their views and offer any suggestions you believe would be helpful to them. This is a time, also, when you can share some of your personal experience on the value of sharing faith in marriage. Next, go over the Couple’s Report from the marriage inventory page-by-page.

The Third Meeting: “Issues”

During this third and final meeting, your couple will choose a decision or issue they would like to resolve. Begin with the introduction to the “Issues” conversation. Next, before they begin filling out their talk sheets, be sure to point out that this conversation is different from the others in that they follow a step-by-step process. During this

conversation you may need to enter their conversation to affirm, mediate, or help couples to be sure to hear and listen to what the other is saying. At the end of their conversation, invite them to say what they thought of the process. Suggest that this is a process they will want to use many times in the years ahead. Affirm them for the hard work they have done.

Go over the next page, “Rules for Resolving Conflicts,” and go over the list one-by-one giving your own insights to this list of guidelines. Finally, invite your couple to complete the promise activity on the reverse side of the “Rules for Resolving Conflicts.”

At the end of this session you may want to give the couple a copy of “*Love Never Ends: Catholic Edition*.” You can review pages from this book at www.talkpoints.com. In addition, it’s a good idea to give them two blank “Marriage Journals” so they will have a place to record the milestone events of their marriage, as well as, a place to write responses to the conversations in “Love Never Ends.” Assign them to have the first conversation in “Love Never Ends” at 6 months after their wedding day. Also, highlight the “Issues” conversation in the book and “Our Wedding Anniversary” as conversations they can utilize for years to come. They can use their blank “Marriage Journals” to record responses to the guided conversations instead of writing in the book.

OPTION THREE:

Meet four or more times with your couple.

If there are areas of concern from the pre-marriage inventory or special needs or issues your couple wants to discuss, you may want to meet with them more than three times.

OPTION FOUR:

Meet with two or more couples at the same time.

Instead of meeting with one couple, a pastor or educator may choose to meet with two or more couples in a small group setting. Follow the three session agenda above, but when couples have filled out their talk sheets, invite them to find a private place in your home or church to have their conversation. When each couple returns from the conversation, invite them to give feedback and have discussion related to the topic.

OPTION FIVE:

Adapt the weekend retreat format to your own needs. (Pages 71-72)

HELPFUL LINKS:

www.talkpoints.com

www.mnmarriagepreparation.com

www.smartmarriages.com

www.prepare-enrich.com

www.couplecheckup.com

www.ccli.org

www.boma-usa.org

www.nfpandmore.org

www.nacflm.org

www.old.usccb.org/laity/marriage

A closing remark from Rev. Dr. Frank Nelson:

A bride who just completed my course wrote this: *Dear Rev. Frank, I really enjoyed the process. Thank you so much for guiding us on this journey into a successful marriage. We are so much better prepared for the long and loving road ahead.*

I wish you continued joy and grace as you come alongside engaged couples who are preparing for their own long and loving road ahead in marriage.

**If you have questions about how to implement this
program into your diocese or parish,
please contact Rev. Dr. Frank Nelson today at talkpoints@aol.com.**