

Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life

Marriage preparation needs to imitate the catechumenate, having as its the goal the formation of missionary disciples of Jesus Christ who will build their domestic churches for the glory of God. This entails not a mere program but a process to which we are inviting couples and our local Church to journey together. Pope Francis calls us to ground marriage prep in the process of Christian initiation and bring out the connection between marriage and the other sacraments. A catechumenate model of marriage formation follows the four stages of Christian Initiation: Evangelization, Catechesis, Purification and Enlightenment, and Mystagogy.

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. (n. 207)

Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016

The Vatican Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life outlines phases and stages of a marriage catechumenate in *Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life* that mirror the stages of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults:

Catechumenal Itinerary of Marriage Preparation	Order of Christian Initiation of Adults
Precatechumenal Phase: remote preparation, which includes the pastoral care of children and youth	Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate
Intermediate phase (several weeks): reception of the candidates for marriage	
<i>Rite for Entrance into the “Catechumenate of Marriage”</i>	<i>Rite for Entrance into the Catechumenate</i>
Catechumenal Phase	Period of the Catechumenate
First Stage: proximate preparation (about one year) <i>Rite of Betrothal</i> brief entrance retreat into final preparation	<i>Rite of Election</i>
Second Stage: immediate preparation (a few months), which ends with short retreat in preparation for the wedding (a few days before the celebration)	Period of Purification and Enlightenment
<i>Celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony</i>	<i>Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation</i>
Third Stage: first years of married life (2-3 years)	Period of Mystagogy

The marriage catechumenate would ideally be a personalized process of marriage preparation that includes for each couple: invitation to faith and conversion, discernment, (re)catechesis, liturgical preparation, and mystagogy by clergy, religious, and especially married couples from the community. "...each of the following elements should be included (without any exceptions): formation, reflection, discussion, dialogue, liturgy, community, prayer, and celebration" (*Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life*, n. 16).

Like most of the other sacraments, the locus of marriage preparation should be the [parish](#). "The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony." (AL 202) Marriage

preparation involves the whole Christian community, supporting the engaged couple along their sacramental journey. It is a collaborative effort by the pastor and fellow families in the community.

It is strongly recommended that parishes incorporate the role of [mentors to accompany](#) couples preparing for Holy Matrimony. Like sponsors for catechumens, mentors serve as guides for the engaged couples and participate in the process of marriage preparation. The mentor couple model has a lasting effect. It helps to form personal relationships and integrates engaged couples into the life of the parish, so that newlyweds (marriage neophytes) have a trusted mentor couple (marriage sponsors) and a supportive community (their parish) they can turn to as they take those first steps living together the Church's vision for marriage.

'The Synod Fathers emphasized that Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through "their joy-filled witness as domestic churches".' (AL 200) The place for marriage formation is in our homes and at our parishes, where couples make this journey with other couples in relationship and in community, not merely in a class or series of requirements.