

How Marriage Sensitive is Your Parish?

An Assessment and Discussion Tool

The United States Catholic Bishops urge the Catholic Church to become a community of hope and help for marriages and to join others in building a culture of marriage.

Four distinct areas of opportunity for the Church to evangelize and catechize on the Sacrament of Matrimony are presented here, and divided into the categories of Formation, Preparation, Celebration, and Continuing Education.

Formation covers the time period of birth until engagement; Preparation is the actual engagement period leading up to the marriage; Celebration and Continuing Education continue after the wedding day.

There are opportunities during these times to foster marital unions that are open to God's grace and reflective of God's love.

This tool is designed for parish leaders to analyze and discuss their marriage sensitivity and to set goals for the parish. This is not an all-inclusive listing, nor is it likely that any parish would be able to do all the things listed.



This assessment provides a sampling of possibilities, realizing that parishes may demonstrate their marriage sensitivity in other ways as well. While this can be used individually, it is intended for use by a group of parish leaders such as the parish staff, parish council, key volunteers, etc. who have a broad understanding of parish life.

Individuals complete this separately and then compare and discuss the scores. The goal is to stimulate discussion that leads to action. General impressions are welcome. The value rests in the discussion that follows its administration, not in the specific score.

GETTING STARTED:

Read each section individually. Place a check if your parish is already doing what is suggested. Then rank the level of sensitivity you believe is present in that particular area of parish life at this time, on a scale of 1 to 10 using the following:

- Score 1-3: Few, if any, of the items noted are present.
- Score 4-6: Some of the items noted are operating in the parish.
- Score 7-9: Sensitivity to marriage and to many of the items noted, plus others, are present.
- Score of 10: Our parish does it all and then some!



FORMATION

Parishes with a high degree of marriage sensitivity might have:

___A budget for Marriage Ministry.

___A trained paid or volunteer Marriage Minister.

___A staff member with responsibility for promoting marriage enrichment programs.

___Child care availability for parents of active young children that is clean, safe, carpeted, well-lit, ventilated, and can be provided for events (Sunday Mass, marriage enrichment, etc.).

___Pastoral ministers who understand and appreciate common struggles in marriage.

___A parish mission statement which includes the important role of marriage to the faith community and spells out the various types of married families.

___Leaders who are aware of basic Catholic teachings on marriage, marriage preparation, divorce, annulment, and remarriage.

___Leaders who attend workshops and seminars on marriage-related topics and concerns.

___Partnerships between married families and single-parent families for the purpose of witnessing Christian marriage.

___Regular and frequent homilies that highlight the Church's theology of marriage.

___An organized outreach and welcome extended to married couples of various cultures.

___Homilies that connect marriage struggles and triumphs to the scriptures.

___Involvement of married couples in the various stages of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process.

___Someone who periodically asks the question, "Can we do this in a more marriage sensitive way?" and "Are we including all the married couples in our parish?"

___A trained Youth Minister with a capacity to provide healthy relationship programs for youth.

___Upper grade high school students who coordinate relationship education programs for youth.

___A youth ministry program that coordinates education on marriage for youth and invites parents to attend.

___Married couples as religious

educators for teaching about the Sacrament of Matrimony to youth and engaged.

___A good program of sexuality education for youths and adults.

___Connection to area schools, both elementary and high schools, to provide education for youth.

___Mentor couples for youth to talk about issues relevant to them concerning marriage.

___Teams of married couples as catechists.



Score _____

PREPARATION

Parishes with a high degree of marriage sensitivity might have:

___A welcoming program for new families.

___Genuine hospitality that warmly welcomes and congratulates those who seek to be married in the parish.

___A marriage preparation strategy that includes well-trained married couples as presenters and facilitators.

___Mentor couples program for engaged couples.

___Publicity in the bulletin about marriage preparation opportunities.

___Special assistance for engaged couples entering interfaith or ecumenical marriages.

___Recognition of newly engaged at weekend Masses.

___Volunteer opportunities for engaged couples to do together such as walk-a-thons, cleaning parish grounds, or helping at the local food pantry, which are promoted by the parish.

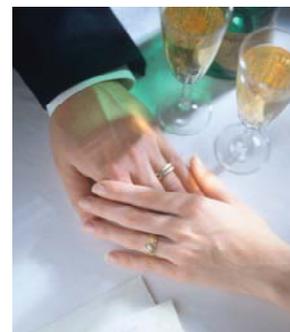
___Bulletin board in back of church or in bulletin with photos of engaged couples.

___Parish shower for the engaged.

___Annulment support information for those who have divorced and seek marriage in the Church.

___Annulment support ministers who are trained to assist those seeking annulment help.

___Access to well-trained Natural Family Planning instructors.



Score _____



CELEBRATION

Parishes with a high degree of marriage sensitivity might have:

___ Sunday liturgies that lift up and celebrate married couples.
___ Prayers of petition that regularly include a variety of marriage, divorce, and annulment needs and concerns.
___ Married couples serving as couples when lecturing, being Eucharistic Ministers, etc.
___ Practical bulletin inserts that promote marriage with prayers, customs, rituals, and traditions throughout the year.
___ Specific opportunities for couples and families to attend mass together.
___ Affirmation and celebration of the sacred in the ordinariness of married life.
___ Regular celebrations of anniversaries monthly, yearly, five years,

twenty-five years, etc.
___ Periodic opportunities for couples to renew their vows.
___ Recognize wedding anniversaries of parishioners during the announcements before or after Mass.
___ Anniversary couples for the week ahead to stand and be acknowledged at Mass on weekend.
___ A special celebration as part of World Marriage Day (second Sunday of February).
___ Celebrations of the unique ethnic and cultural heritages of married couples.
___ Open invitations for parishioners, particularly families with children, to attend weddings at the parish.



Score _____

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Parishes with a high degree of marriage sensitivity might have:

___ A Marriage Ministry Team or similar parish committee responsible for marriage ministry.
___ Ongoing education for parish staff and new members of parish staff on church teaching related to marriage.
___ Staff who listen to the needs and concerns of married couples via surveys, home visitations, parish census, etc.
___ Adult education programs which address topics related to marriage and family life.
___ Regular opportunities for married couples to deepen their understanding of the Sacrament of Matrimony.
___ Publicity for local marriage initiatives.
___ Either a trained marriage counselor on staff or parish leaders who are familiar enough with community services to make good referrals.
___ A bulletin, which includes information on community services, that may be of interest to married couples.
___ Links to good Internet sites that support marriage on the parish website and in bulletins.

___ Opportunities for married couples to be in small Christian communities.
___ Education and enrichment opportunities for: singles, engaged couples, married couples, parents, divorced, separated, widowed, hurting families, stepfamilies, and elders on healthy relationships.
___ Marriage enrichment retreats and resources in different languages.
___ Marriage programs that are sensitive to different types of couples such as step, newly married, or empty nesters.
___ Various like-to-like ministry programs for couples at different stages of the life cycle such as newly married couples meeting together, parents of teens, empty nest couples, etc.
___ An intergenerational marriage support ministry for adult faith formation with married couples.
___ Special issue-oriented educational programs that involve the whole family.
___ A system of support and outreach to couples at the time of a diagnosis of a family member with special needs (birth, time of accident, unemployment).

___ A good referral system for dealing with child, spouse, or elder abuse.
___ Programs which address alcohol and other drug abuse issues.
___ Information on domestic violence readily available.
___ Bulletin announcements for Retrouvaille and other programs for hurting marriages.
___ Partnerships with other parishes for assisting hurting marriages anonymously.
___ Events that support legislative actions that help preserve, protect, and promote marriage.
___ Planned opportunities for parishioners to write to legislators asking each family member to sign the letter.
___ Date nights for married couples with child care provided!

Score _____



There are probably several ways in which your parish is marriage sensitive that were not mentioned in this tool. Make a list of those items in the space to the right and score them. If you are unable to think of any other possibilities, give your parish a score of 1-3. If there are several other items, give your parish a score of 4-6. If there are many other items, give your parish a score of 7-9.

If you are a model parish, give yourself a score of 10.

Score _____

When you have completed the individual sections, add your scores together. Remember: low scores indicate that there is plenty of room for growth! High scores mean you are to be commended — keep up the good work!

Overall Total Score
(add all scores together):



MARRIAGE RESOURCES

www.familyministries.org: Resources and products to strengthen marriage and families from the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

www.inthespiritofcana.org: Marriage Ministry Guidelines of the Archdiocese of Chicago — assists dioceses and parishes in their ministry to marriage.

www.foryourmarriage.org: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website supporting marriage.

www.wvme.org: Worldwide Marriage Encounter — A weekend for married couples to have an opportunity to enrich their marriage.

www.retrouvaille.org: Retrouvaille — A program for couples in trouble in their marriage, to help them renew and heal their marriage relationship.

www.smartmarriages.com: An interest group dedicated to marriage support and education to help reduce family breakdown.

www.successfulstepfamilies.com: Christian resources for pre-remarital couples, stepfamilies, and the churches that serve them.



www.familyministries.org
312.751.8351