

I want to start tomorrow, where do I begin?

Whatever your parish situation is, there is a path for you.

1. You have a Marriage Prep Coordinator or a good prospect for one.

Send this person/couple to be trained in *Witness to Love*. Publicize the role, the individual(s) and the ministry in a bulletin promo. Have them introduce themselves at all of the Masses. Update the marriage guidelines on the parish website. The next couple to come through for marriage prep will use this new model.

All couples currently in marriage prep may continue in their process. However, you can ask them to find a “sponsor” couple and they can still benefit from the *Witness to Love* model, which continues after the wedding, but more in the style of marriage enrichment.

2. You are new to a parish and do not have a Marriage Prep Coordinator or even a potential one. For the first year you could combine the roles and even the meetings for Marriage Prep Coordinator and clergy. Consider the mentor couples you’ve worked with and which one might be a good fit for the role of Marriage Prep Coordinator. Send this couple to be trained. It’s a bonus for both you and them since they already know the process and the benefits of it.

3. You already have mentor couples in your parish. One of the couples could be the “team leader”. The team leader would assign certain couples to follow up with engaged couples and their mentors after the wedding. The team leader would assign other couples to meet with engaged couples and their mentors two times before the wedding just like the normal *Witness to Love* process.

4. You are worried about the ability of couples in your parish to be mentors, or if you find due to location dynamics, that your parish is too disconnected or too large. You could have available mentor couples on your website that you have selected. Ideally these would be a diverse group of mentors. Engaged couples who are not part of your parish or unable to find a mentor from among their married friends would select from these couples.

Getting an Engaged Couple Started

The “Witness to Love” model typically proceeds along the following progression:

Initial Meeting with the Priest/Deacon:

- Welcome the engaged couple
- Explore their motives for marriage and assess their level of faith
- Establish their “freedom to marry”
- Present an overview of the marriage preparation process
- Arrange for them to complete an inventory (e.g. PREPARE)
- Inform them of the process for selection of a mentor couple

The basic mentor couple guidelines:

1. Married 5 years or more
2. Active in the Church
3. Have a marriage the engaged couple admires
4. Preferably attends the same church as the engaged couples.

Review of Inventory by Marriage Prep Coordinator and Coaching of Mentors:

- Review the results of the pre-marital inventory
- Decide which issues and exercises the engaged couple will need to complete
- Design the “Scavenger Hunt” with activities to be completed by both the engaged and mentor couples
- Assist in securing the cooperation of the selected mentor couple
- Establish a meeting with both the engaged and mentor couples
- Arrange a meeting with the MPC: Meet with MPC, engaged and mentor couples.
- The MPC invites the engaged couple into their home to briefly review the results of the pre-marital inventory
- The mentor couple arrives a little later and receives the materials and instructions from the MPC for the follow-up sessions and Scavenger Hunt

A cheat sheet for your first meeting

Initial Meeting - Marriage Prep Coordinator, Engaged Couple and Mentor Couple

Ice-Breaker: Welcome. Let them know that we just covered the questionnaire with the engaged couple. Make sure that everyone knows it is OK to laugh.

Key conversation questions

- How did you couples meet? How long have you known each other?
- To engaged couple: Tell us why you chose this particular couple to mentor you? What were the traits and characteristics that caught your attention?
- To mentor couple: Can you share with us a little bit about your initial thoughts on this process and/or the couple that has asked you to walk with them in the formation for marriage? How is this process similar or different from your own marriage preparation?

Introduce *Witness to Love*

- What is the role of the Marriage Preparation Coordinator?
- Explain the vision for this way of preparing for marriage. Explain what the Coordinator and the Parish will be providing during this period.
- What will the mentor be providing for the engaged couple?
 - Providing a secure place (relationship) through mentors for couples during difficult times
 - Ensuring a connectedness to parish and understanding the need/value for community - A lifeline to the Church and to God
 - The process (nuts and bolts) of building up the relationship
 - Scavenger Hunt - includes everything that will be done
 - How the mentors will use the questionnaire and quickly review a copy with them (Couples Report only not full facilitator’s report)
 - Date nights - describe
 - Answer Mentor’s question of “what exactly do I do?”
 - Explain how all the books are just tools to help mentor couple understand how to share their marriage, and to do it in a way that strengthens their own marriage as well
 - Distribute Trade Book focusing on how to share marriage

Workbook and 6 Meeting Overview:

- Remember that this is basically an outline of the conversations for the 6 meetings that will take place. It is here that mentors will find the suggestions of how to share their marriage.
- Explain how to prepare for each meeting.
- Use Chapter 3 in workbook as model chapter for first meeting. Remember to highlight need for prayer in each meeting. Explain design of charts and scales in workbook.
- Explain extremes (ex. turned inwards to smothering).
- Discerning which virtue is most important and needs to be the focus.
- Help mentor couple see the value in preparing a personal story of their own for each meeting. Understanding most effective ways of sharing, not so much about just talking but about sharing.
- Explain significance of term “beloved”.
- Reinforce essential element or value of having a mentor couple and the benefits of relationships and accountability; that what is unique about WTL is that there will always be at least one of the four desire to fulfill commitments of mentoring process.
- Remind them that their 6 meetings should each last no longer than 1 ½ hours.

Wrap Up

- Any questions that were not answered?
- Coordinator provides timeline based on their requested wedding date.
- Closing prayer
- Guys are invited to leave and discuss their double date, and to set a date and time.

Email Summary of key points to them after you meet.

On-going sessions between engaged and mentor couples

- The two couples decide on a schedule of meetings and the activities outlined in the Scavenger Hunt
- Meetings follow the outline for the sessions presented in the “Witness to Love: Couple’s Guide”, along with the materials that correspond to the strength and growth areas identified in the pre-marital Inventory
- Chapter 5 Theology meeting with Priest/Deacon
 - Prior to the 5th session with the mentor couple, the engaged couple will have attended the “Theology Day” provided by the Parish or Diocese with the instructions to return with at least 5 questions they would like answered in more depth.
 - The mentor couple would then arrange for a meeting in their home with the priest/deacon, the engaged couple and the mentor couple to explore the answers to the questions that the engaged couple raised.
 - The purpose of this meeting is two-fold: 1) to deepen the understanding of the Church’s theology of marriage for the engaged couple and 2) to reawaken an appreciation for the Church’s understanding of marriage for the mentor couple

Follow-up Meetings:

- After the wedding, the newly married couple and the engaged couple are urged to continue meeting at least once every two months to continue their discussions of marriage and marital spirituality (mystagogia).
- The engaged couple is encouraged to turn to their mentor couple whenever the need arises to address any struggles or disagreements they may have.
- The relationship between the couples could continue indefinitely.