



Ministry Description

Marriage Preparation Sponsor Couples

Objective

Sponsor Couples help engaged couples prepare for married life, exploring their relationship strengths and work areas.

The goal of the relationship is to encourage the engaged couple to communicate about and make necessary changes on important relationship issues.

Parish programs / expectations for marriage preparation vary widely. This outline only gives a broad sequence, based on typical pastoral practice and the advice of the Office of Family Ministries.

- Sponsor couples should always follow the instructions of their pastor / PLC over the 'rule of thumb' advise of the archdiocesan office.
- Every inventory (e.g. PREPARE or FOCCUS) offers resources and recommendations for following up and sharing feedback for that inventory. Couples can and should use these resources, however ...
- Some adaptation will be necessary for making the follow-up process more appropriate to the sponsor couple, who are not "counselors" or "therapists."

Desired Qualities

- Caring, empathetic, non-judgmental
- Mature ... married for at least a few years (3-5 years minimum recommended)
- Can listen well and keep confidences
- Committed to ongoing personal and marital growth
- Living a Christian marriage
- Believe in and enjoy sharing their faith
- Aware of their gifts as well as their limits

Skills

1. All Sponsor Couples use ...
 - their own marital experiences and relationship,
 - their Christian respect and concern for others,
 - relationship assessment tools,
 - listening and basic facilitation skills
2. Sponsor Couples create trusting, confidential relationships through which they minister to their peers — one couple to another.
3. Sponsor Couples respect the abilities of others to understand and find solutions to their own problems
 - Sponsor Couples do not take responsibility for the problems of others.
 - The interaction should never become a one-sided lecture or a "sales pitch"
 - Respecting the _____ is essential
 - life experience of the couple (and each partner)
 - opinions and perspectives (even when the sponsor couple does not agree)
 - the couple's confidentiality

Activities

1. Meet with engaged couples 3 to 6 times (as a general rule) if Sponsor Couples are administering the pre-marital inventory
 - 2-5 if Sponsor Couple is not administering the pre-marital inventory
 - Less than 3 meetings indicate ...
 - that engaged couple is very mature and demonstrate exceptionally strong relationship skills, especially communication ...OR...
 - that engaged couple is not open to participating and not engaging the discussion (don't force them).
 - 5-6 meetings (the exception in most circumstances) indicate ...
 - that a relatively strong friendship has developed between the two couples. ...OR...
 - there is much to discuss, the conversation is fruitful and both couples are being mutually enriched by the ongoing discussion.
 - 3-4 meetings should be the typical schedule.
2. Sponsor couples may be asked to administer the pre-marital inventory.
3. Whether or not sponsor couples use additional, published resources, the follow-up feedback they share with the engaged couples should reflect the assessment measured by the pre-marital inventory.
... HOWEVER ...
4. The relationship between the engaged couple and the sponsor couple should not just focus on the results of the inventory.
 - Sponsor couples must be discerning about which issues are truly strengths and which issues really challenge the couple, based on their experience, regardless of what the inventory may indicate.
 - The tone of the discussions should be organic, or comfortable, and flexible, not rigidly structured or overly technical or theological.

Benefits

- ✓ Opportunity to participate in an effective, vital ministry
- ✓ Witnessing the joy and growth experienced by those couples with whom you are working
- ✓ Building a closer, more satisfying marriage of one's own ... Serving as a sponsor couple is **excellent enrichment!**
- ✓ Supporting and strengthening Christian families by facilitating the acquisition of new skills and insights within the engaged couple's relationship.