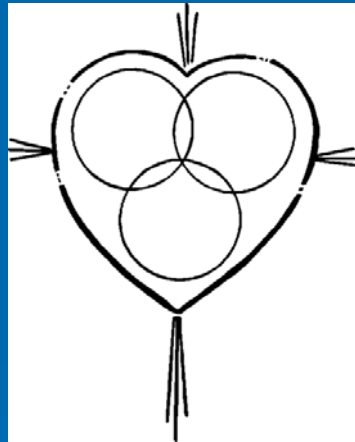


# Marriage Preparation and NFP: At the Service of the Sacrament

*Love*

*Life*



*Gift of Self*

Tara L. Plymouth, MTS, BSN, RN

# Opening Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

# Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

- “The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a *journey of faith*. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in the married state.”  
---*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 51

# Marriage Preparation

- **The sacredness of the spouses' love--an image of Christ's love for his Bride, the Church**
- **Manifesting God's love to each other and to the world**
- **Assisting engaged couples in developing a solid foundation for permanent, faithful, and life-giving love in marriage.**

# Vision for Marriage Preparation and Family Life Ministry

- Encountering the love of Jesus Christ.
- Journey of faith; the Family Life Office facilitates an encounter with Jesus Christ as a *person*.

# Vision for Marriage Preparation and Family Life Ministry

- Encounter
- Conversion
- Communion
- Mission



# Marriage Preparation

- **The Family Life Office offers various Marriage Preparation Programs.**



# Options for Marriage Preparation in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

## ➤ From the Family Life Office:

- Archdiocesan Regional Marriage Preparation Program (4 evening sessions; diff. locations monthly)
- Archdiocesan Weekend Retreats (3-4 per year)

## ➤ From Other Sources:

- Parish Marriage Preparation Programs (individual parishes; format varies)
- Hispanic Marriage Preparation
- African American Marriage Preparation

# The Archdiocese of Philadelphia Marriage Preparation Policy

- Purpose: To identify what should be in place for an adequate program of marriage preparation in the Archdiocese.
- Can be found at [www.flophila.org](http://www.flophila.org).

# The Marriage Preparation Policy Promotes and Discusses:

- The dignity of marriage
- Role of the couple's marriage in the life and mission of the church
- Pastoral care of engaged couples

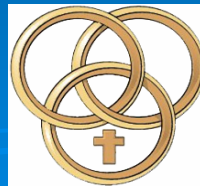
# Marriage Preparation Program Components, per the Policy (non-NFP-related)

Catholic marriage preparation programs in the Archdiocese should include presentations on:

- 1. Church teaching on the nature and purpose of marriage;
- 2. Spirituality of marriage and family life;
- 3. Communication/interpersonal skills and values in marriage;
- 4. A premarital inventory, such as FOCCUS;

# Marriage Preparation Program Components, per the Policy (NFP-related)

- 5. Sexual intimacy as interpersonal communion which is unitive and procreative;
- 6. Natural Family Planning which builds upon Church teaching on human sexuality and the principle of “responsible parenthood.” It is recommended that this include a witness component from a NFP-practicing couple.



*Life-Giving  
Communion*

# Natural Family Planning

- Basic intro to NFP during FLO marriage prep
- Sympto-thermal full NFP classes at different locations monthly.
- In both, we teach that NFP is in accord with the faithful, fruitful, and permanent nature of marriage, and with every couple's call to responsible parenthood.

# NFP Classes

- The sympto-thermal method we teach was developed by the Diocese of Harrisburg.
- We also refer couples to other models of NFP.

# Marriage Prep and NFP

- We weave messages throughout *each* session which are consistent with the Church's teaching on NFP.
- NFP and messages about fruitfulness and openness to the other are not an isolated part of marriage preparation sessions; they are an integral part of each session.



# Marriage Prep and NFP

- We also weave content about the wedding vows throughout our marriage prep sessions. These likewise are reflected in how we teach about **NFP**.
- We encourage the couples to give oneself in service and sacrifice; this is also reflected in our teaching on **NFP**.



# An Overview of the Family Life Office's Marriage Preparation Sessions



# Session One: Christian Marriage: Covenant and Sign of God's Love

- Preliminary catechesis on the marriage vows.
  - Fidelity, permanence, and openness to the gift of children.
- The covenantal and sacramental nature of marriage.



# Session One: Christian Marriage: Covenant and Sign of God's Love

- The nature of Jesus.
  - *Source and summit* of spousal love.
  - Called to have a relationship with Him.
- The character of spousal love, as *reciprocal self-gift*.



# Session One: Christian Marriage: Covenant and Sign of God's Love

- Scripture: the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-15).
  - Jesus beholds the woman with love.
  - Jesus calls the woman to *communion*.

# Session Two: Called to Communion: Communicating in Truth and Love

- Communication between spouses is a deeper reality than “communication techniques and skills.”
- The deeper reality is *how to communicate unitive and fruitful love*; this includes an open stance before God and before one’s fiancé.

# Session Two: Called to Communion: Communicating in Truth and Love

- Scripture: Gen 2:18-25: Creation of the woman when Adam is asleep:
  - Adam and Eve are “naked without shame”: physically, emotionally, & spiritually.
  - They *trust each other* and *give themselves to each other completely*.
  - It is a stance of receptivity and self-giving love.

# Session Two: Called to Communion: Communicating in Truth and Love

- This teaching on mutual complete self-giving dovetails with the mutual complete self-gift taught with **NFP**.
- Sexual difference reveals that we were created “from the beginning” for unitive and fruitful love. → so too with how we teach about **NFP**.

# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

- The fruitfulness of marriage finds its source in Jesus Christ.
- Sexual difference makes the fruitfulness of authentic communion possible.



# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

- The fruits of marriage are its goods:
  - Fidelity
  - Unity
  - Indissolubility
  - Openness to Fertility
- The meaning of our identity as male and female is to *give and receive fruitful love.*



# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

## ➤ Chastity is:

- A stance; one desires and seeks the good of the other, and never *uses* the other as a means to an end.
- Expressed differently, depending on one's state of life.
  - Unmarried
  - Married

# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

- “NFP introduction” (10-15 min.) is given :
  - Introduced as “fertility awareness;” at service of marital love; respects unitive and procreative dimensions.
  - Significance of the fertility signs; the fertile window.
  - Differences between NFP and ABC.

# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

- Then, an NFP-using married couple witnesses to the benefits of NFP to their marriage.

# Session Three: Christian Marriage: A Vocation to Fruitfulness

- We teach that NFP allows the married couple to:
  - Give oneself completely
  - Communicate openly
  - Be open to the gift of children
  - Postpone conception for a time (serious reasons)
  - Listen to the body, and to the Lord
  - Accept how God has made us for fruitful love

# Session Four: The Mission of Marriage: The Domestic Church Towards a Culture of Life

- Marriage is a sign to the world of God's love.
- Inviting Jesus into our lives will transform us, and the world.
- In giving yourselves completely to one another, you are giving yourselves to God.



# Session Four: The Mission of Marriage: The Domestic Church Towards a Culture of Life

- Your home can become a *domestic church*.
- Even in everyday routines, the mystery of Christ's presence (water turned to wine) unfolds.
- Your marriage becomes a place of encounter, conversion, communion, and mission.

# Session Four: The Mission of Marriage: The Domestic Church Towards a Culture of Life

- Ways to share Christ's love as a married couple: prayer, the Sacraments, serving the poor, etc. → Mission.
- **Primary mission:** to be an image of God's love in the world
- Look to the Holy Family as an example.

# The Effects of the Culture on Marriage Prep

- Couples come with these values and categories :
  - Acquisition
  - Rugged individuality
  - Efficiency
  - Materialism
  - “I am what I do”
  - Appreciation for marriage as sacrament is reduced → ceremonial; Pre-Cana is a “hoop” to go through.

# How You Can Approach the Engaged Couple

- Opportunity for evangelization.
- Window into the light of Trinitarian love.
- Introduce bit by bit:
  - Gift of self
  - Sacrifice
  - Fruitfulness
  - Holiness
- Be an instrument to begin helping the couple to see that their love is a reflection of God's love.
- Encouragement in little victories. Process takes patience, time, and trust.
- Love them into what you are trying to teach them.

# Jesus is the Model

- Meet couples where they are
- Get to know them
- Call them to something deeper
- Ongoing invitation



# FLO Offerings: NFP Witness Couple Resource List

- These couples are willing to do NFP presentations at parish pre-Cana programs which do not have “in-house” NFP-presenting couples.
- Contact the FLO if your parish has this need.

# FLO Offerings: Team Training for Pre-Cana/Marriage Prep

- FLO receives requests for training of their parish pre-Cana Teams.
- The marriage preparation administrator and FLO Director can meet with pre-Cana teams in any parish to assist them in:
  - Pre-Cana program assessment.
  - Improving their pre-Cana presentations.
  - Days of retreat.

# Staff of the FLO

- Dominic Lombardi, M.A., S.T.L., Director
- Tara Plymouth, M.T.S., B.S.N., R.N., Administrator, Natural Family Planning
- Ann Hanincik, M.T.S., Administrator, Marriage Preparation Programs
- Laura Ford, M.S., Administrator, Prison Ministry Program

Phone: 215-587-5639

Fax: 215-587-3561

famlife@adphila.org

Website: <http://www.flophila.org>

Address:

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

222 N. 17th Street

Philadelphia, PA 19103