

Marriage preparation is ‘a gift’

When it comes to marriage preparation, the first place couples should turn is the parish to which they belong.

“The parish may have a parish-based program, either a sponsor couple program or a group-style class, which the couple can attend,” said Lauri Przybysz, coordinator for marriage and family life for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. “If they have not yet registered in a parish, marriage preparation is the perfect time to form that relationship,” she said.

Couples may register for archdiocesan pre-Cana programs hosted by other parishes by contacting the Division of Catechetical and Pastoral Formation at 410-547-5406. A schedule of archdiocesan pre-Cana classes can be found at www.archbalt.org/family-life/marriage-family/marriage-preparation/index.cfm

The fee is \$80 for archdiocesan programs, and, according to Przybysz, the configuration of the program will be determined by the host parish.

“They are not all identical,” she said.

Another option is to attend the weekend program, Catholic Engaged Encounter. Couples can sign up by visiting www.mdcee.org.

“The ultimate judge of the acceptability of the program is the priest or deacon who will be marrying the couple and witnessing the vows,” Przybysz said. She noted that all the programs will cover the key topics known to be important for marriage preparation and some catechesis about the sacrament of marriage. Topics may include reflections on commitment, communication, children in the future and family life, an introduction to natural family planning, skills in conflict resolution and the spirituality of the couple. The programs will include some type of pre-marriage inventory designed to encourage communication within the couple.

“Many couples don’t understand that marriage prep is something beyond just the class,” Przybysz said. “It’s a whole process that includes meeting with the priest and deacon, preparing readings and also their own time of spiritual preparation. “It’s a gift, really, to have the opportunity to just step back and reflect on your future

together,” Przybysz said. “I encourage couples to take this time as a retreat.” Formal marriage preparation should begin at least six months before the wedding date.