

# Preparation program gives couples a hand in marriage

Single people who plan to marry in the Catholic church are required to attend a marriage preparation program in some form, whether participating in an organized program through a parish or in another arrangement that their priest deems appropriate to cover “the five Cs” of marriage preparation: community, conflict resolution, commitment, children and church.

Three program options (to total 9-12 hours) meet the diocese’s requirements: sponsor couple, group preparation, or attending an Engaged Encounter weekend. All are staffed by parish volunteers and include the FOCCUS pre-marriage inventory (Facilitation Open Couple Communication Understanding and Study) which is a self-diagnostic tool designed to help couples learn more about themselves and their relationship and to identify and work through issues before saying I do.

**Sponsor couple** – The most flexible program offered is facilitated by a trained married couple; those preparing to marry will schedule sessions with a sponsor couple from their parish. There are hundreds of volunteers trained to be sponsor couples in the archdiocese.

**Parish group preparation** – Some parishes help couples meet the marriage preparation requirement by offering a group program. Witness couples become part of the team.

**Engaged Encounter weekend** – Couples meet the marriage preparation requirement during a weekend at the Holy Trinity Spiritual Center, Pikesville, where they engage in workshops and other retreat-type activities.

Kathy Corbett, 54, has been married to Tim for 34 years; together they serve as a sponsor couple through St. John the Evangelist, Frederick.

“Our faith has been something that has enriched our marriage, and it’s something that has kept us growing. As I tell the engaged couples – having a God-centered marriage is a difference between having an average marriage and an awesome

marriage.”

The church’s mission in offering marriage preparation, according to Mrs. Przybysz, is “to help couples to bring their marriage to the church and to work on some skills to help with daily relationships. We want their marriage to succeed not just for personal happiness but for the mission in Jesus as well.”

Discussion topics include sacrament of marriage, spirituality, communication, intimacy and sexuality, money, conflict resolution, family life, family planning, problem solving, in-laws, religion and values, expectations and dual careers.

“Marriage prep is a lifelong process,” said Mrs. Przybysz. “We provide the program that we believe has all the elements shown by research which couples have found to be helpful.”