



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

August 26, 2019

Dear Brother Priests,

Today I write to you about our need to reimagine marriage preparation here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

For the last several decades, marriage preparation has focused on two primary areas—providing couples with important marriage skills (e.g., communication and conflict resolution) and catechizing couples on the essential properties of marriage. Today, couples approach the Church for marriage in far fewer numbers and many of those who do come have far less remote and proximate preparation than the Church assumes. With the continued decline in religiosity and the growing emergence of so-called “nones” among millennials and their subsequent cohorts, I dare say we assume too much of these couples. We are at a point in the history of the Church in the United States that calls us to focus far more intently on welcoming young adults (back) to their local Catholic community and (re-)introducing them to the person of Jesus Christ. To be sure, we still must provide couples with formation on the essential properties of marriage and certain skills, but this should be grounded in a relationship with Christ and His Church.

I know that all too often we invest time with couples whom we never again see at Mass; nevertheless, as we know so well, we must be like the loving father who *goes out* to meet *both* of his sons—the prodigal and the faithful. We must exhibit the loving patience of the father who waits for his son, even as he squanders his inheritance. Strong marriages and families are *essential* to our most important work of evangelization and the vitality of this Church that Christ has entrusted to us.

I am sure you wonder—how are we to do this, especially as time and resources grow scarcer and we continue the pastoral planning process? First, remember that marriage and families should be *central* to our planning efforts. As I said in *A Light Brightly Visible*: “I am hoping our decisions will ensure that parishes are centers of evangelization that connect people with the pastoral, educational, healthcare and social services that they need, with special help in living out the vocation of marriage and family.”

To this end, the Office of Marriage and Family Life has identified the best methods of marriage preparation that are distinctly local and intensely evangelization-focused. Therefore, the Archdiocese will no longer provide marriage preparation packets or register couples for pre-Cana, instead the Office of Marriage and Family Life will support two primary modes of preparation:

- **Witness to Love**, which is a sponsor/mentor couple program that focuses on growing virtue and developing a deeper relationship with a couple's local parish. www.witnesstolove.org
- **Parish/Pastorate-based pre-Cana seminars** with video-based programs and/or local presenters.

In order to ensure that we provide couples with the best marriage preparation, both of these processes necessitate individualized meetings with a priest, deacon, or lay marriage preparer. Recognizing that these may not fit every pastoral need, parishes may also utilize *in a very limited way* online preparation tools when localized preparation is simply not feasible. However, even more so than the others, this method demands a greater involvement by the local community to ensure that the engaged couple is firmly rooted in the community.

I ask all parishes/pastorates to review their marriage preparation process and ensure that it is evangelization-focused and best serves their local parish/pastorate needs by May of 2021.

I am confident that these changes will better serve couples approaching the Church for the Sacrament of Marriage and, therefore, strengthen our local parish communities. **More information can be found in the attached documentation and at: www.archbalt.org/marriageprep.**

Thank you for your continued ministry to couples in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and for all that you do in the service of God's People.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore