

Sponsor Couple Programs

What is a Sponsor Couple Program?

A Sponsor Couple Program is a proven and effective “peer-to-peer” method used to assist engaged couples prepare for marriage. Peer-to-peer refers to an engaged couple interacting with a married couple. The priest or deacon will match the engaged with an appropriate sponsor couple.

How do I choose a program and who trains my sponsor couples?

Typically, a parish first selects their preferred sponsor couple program (there are 4 described below). Next the pastor contacts the two “Marriage Prep Deacons” assigned to their deanery and sets up a training date/s. It is the pastor’s responsibility to designate “Sponsor Couples” from within his parish. The deacons will then train the chosen sponsor couples for the parish.

How often does my sponsor couple meet with my engaged couple?

The engaged couple meets with the married couple 6 to 8 times over a period of several weeks. There are reading assignments and questions to answer before each session. The meetings typically consist of discussion and dialogue based on the readings. The engaged couple participates in conversations they may not have already had including: families of origin, marital communication, marital spirituality, family planning, sexuality and intimacy, and problem solving.

What are my options for Sponsor Couple Programs?

The Diocese of Biloxi Marriage Preparation Policy gives four options for Sponsor Couple Programs. Typically, each parish selects a preferred program that best fits their circumstances. The four options are:

For Better & For Ever, A Resource for Couples Preparing for Christian Marriage.

In using *For Better & For Ever*, sponsor couples are trained to meet the engaged “where they are” as the starting point for dialogue about the vocation of

Matrimony. The Sponsor Couple hosts a series of meetings with the engaged couple in their own home, then after the wedding they follow up with the newly married couple through the first year(s) of marriage. *For Better & For Ever* is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and French.

About half the parishes in the Diocese of Biloxi use this program.

Program Information: Contact: rob@marriagepreparation.com, 210-534-1129. Website: <https://marriagepreparation.com/>

For Better & For Ever **Notes for Deacon Trainers**

1. How married couples learn to be sponsor/mentor couples for engaged couples

Video (45 minutes)

Link to discussion questions:

<https://marriagepreparation.com/assets/pdf/2-060813-cc9-StudyQuest.pdf>

2. Key Topics in For Better and For Ever Workbook (Page 3 in For Better and For Ever)

- a. Families of Origin (Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 5)
- b. Sacrament of Matrimony (Chapters 7, 11, 12, 14 & 19)
- c. Marital Communication (Chapters 9 & 10)
- d. Family Planning (Chapters 15 & 18)
- e. Sexuality & Intimacy (Chapter 7)
- f. Money Matters and Career Planning (Chapter 8)
- g. Special Topics (Ch 6 Couples who are living together/sexually active);
(Ch 13 Mixed religion marriage); (Ch 17 Marrying again and step families)

3. Five Steps Engaged Couples Follow (Page 7 in For Better and For Ever)

1. **Step 1:** Couple prepares to meet with Pastor
 - I. Read Chapters 1, 6, 13, 20 & Appendix D as they apply
 - II. Personal Reflection (after reading each chapter, the engaged answer the questions in the book. This is done separately. Both partners have a book)
 - III. Dialogue: share your reflections...this is not a debate but rather an exercise to grow in your understanding of your partner...not change them
2. **Step 2:** Meet with Priest or Deacon. Discuss chapters from step 1 and you will be assigned a Sponsor Couple to meet with to complete the remaining chapters. (note this may be 2 or more sessions as the priest/deacon will do a

Pre-nuptial Investigation, administer a FOCCUS Assessment, familiarize the couple with Natural Family Planning (NFP) videos, and sign up the couple to take an NFP Course.)

3. **Step 3:** Meet with the Sponsor Couple. (Page 7 in For Better and For Ever)
 - I. Evening 1 – Chapters 2 & 3
 - II. Evening 2 – Chapters 4 & 5
 - III. Evening 3 – Chapters 7, 8 & 9
 - IV. Evening 4 – Chapters 10, 11 & 12
 - V. Evening 5 – Chapters 14, 15, 16, 17 & 18
4. **Step 4:** Meet with the Priest or Deacon again.
 - I. Discuss Chapters 19 & 21 and complete any final paperwork and final wedding plans
5. **Step 5:** Three and 6 months AFTER the wedding meet with Sponsor Couple for a marital “Check Up.”

4. **Online Support** (where to get the video to train Sponsor Couples)

- a. For Better and For Ever Home Page <https://marriagepreparation.com/>
 - i. Select Resources...from that drop-down menu select “For Clergy and Marriage Educators”
 - ii. Then Select Training Videos
 1. Select ENGLISH and watch the video in Part #1
 2. For a copy of the video text select Part #1-English at the bottom

Better Together.

Better Together is a video-based sponsor couple program consisting of 12 components administered in 6 sessions. Each session uses 4 or 5 short (3 to 6 minute) videos to lead the conversation which is guided by the sponsor couple. The engaged couple uses a workbook that has 2 pages of reading for each video short with a place to take notes. In addition, the Leader’s Guide has helpful tips to bring up when discussing each video.

Better Together includes a Premarital Inventory which can be utilized in addition to FOCCUS if desired. This is a new program two parishes have used it and like it.

Program Information: Contact: Dynamic Catholic, 5081 Olympic Blvd. Erlanger, KY 41018. Website: <https://dynamiccatholic.com/better-together>

Beloved, Finding Happiness in Marriage.

Currently 2 parishes use Beloved; St Alphonsus, Ocean Springs and Sacred Heart, Pascagoula.

Program Information: Websites: Augustineinstitute.org and Lighthousecatholicmedia.org, run by Augustine Institute under FORMED. Format: Videos and Guide, may be led by local Sponsor Couple. Videos can be streamed online on FORMED.org.

Unveiled: Marriage Prep Anytime, Anywhere.

The preferred online/ DVD Sponsor Couple Program for the Diocese of Biloxi when an engaged couple is separated by distance is *Unveiled: Marriage Prep Anytime, Anywhere*. This program is primarily to be used as a marriage preparation option when marriage preparation is required while the engaged couple is separated by distance. Long distance preparation, though not ideal, is sometimes necessary due to military service or other factors. Couples may reside in separate cities or at a distance from the place where they will be married.

Military or college chaplains can often provide independent preparation but the presiding minister needs to coordinate the process. Premarital inventories can be done independently, then discussed when the couple is together or via phone, letters, or e-mail. Separation is a challenge but not a reason to omit marriage preparation programs.

Program Information: Online e-learning and DVD; Websites: Unveiledmarriage.com and cdremfl.org; Email: marriage_prep@richmonddiocese.org; Diocese of Richmond VA USA; Format: Videos and Guide, self-led, with online assist.