



Diocese of Trenton

Guidelines for Marriage Mentors for the Engaged

Congratulations! You have been selected to serve as mentors of the engaged because you are a strong and positive role model for others. Here in the Diocese of Trenton our goal is for every engaged couple to be accompanied by an experienced Catholic married couple throughout the marriage preparation process and into the early years of marriage. The practice of marriage mentoring is strongly encouraged by our Holy Father, Pope Francis and is widely embraced in the U. S. and throughout the world.

The Role of Mentor Couples for the Engaged

The role of marriage mentors is to journey with persons who are undergoing sacramental preparation, show them the joy of the Gospel, and serve as the living connection to parish life. Married couples who accompany engaged couples on their journey toward Catholic marriage have an opportunity to live out their baptismal call in a unique way as they share their own experience of the joys and struggles of marriage, and witness to the indwelling of God in their marital relationship.

The relationship between each mentor couple and each engaged couple will be as unique as the couples themselves. There are specific guidelines to follow but there are no formal rules – just a commitment from the engaged couple to learn all they can about Catholic marriage from their mentors, and a commitment from the mentors to be authentic and to reflect the profound joy (and real struggles) of a Christ-centered marriage.

Engaged couples are encouraged to select their own mentors from their local parish. If they are new to the parish, the couple may ask for a recommendation from the priest or deacon who is preparing them for marriage or may be referred to the parish Marriage Mentoring team.

The benefits of mentoring:

- Mentors get to know their engaged couple as fellow members of the Catholic faith community, discuss their hopes and dreams for marriage, offer prayerful support, and share special experiences that have shaped their marriage and reveal how God is present in their everyday lives.
- The mentor-engaged relationship is founded on friendship and fellowship. Mentors share their lives generously and receive countless blessings in return.
- Mentors help engaged persons feel valued by their parish community.
- Mentors are a trusted source of support.
- The engaged have a role model not for the perfect marriage or family, but for a marriage that is strengthened by grace and signifies Christ's total, faithful and fruitful love.
- In the Diocese of Trenton, mentor couples accompany the engaged through the marriage preparation process but they are not responsible for sacramental preparation so they do not need to be experts in Catholic marriage.
- Good mentors are lifelong learners who are willing to learn alongside (and learn from) their engaged couple.

Qualifications of Mentor Couples:

- To serve as a mentor couple you must be validly married in the Catholic Church for at least two years, practice your faith regularly (attend Mass each Sunday), participate regularly in parish activities and strive to live according to the teachings of Christ and his Church.
- Mentors are almost never Marriage counselors, Masters level theologians or trained pastoral ministers.

Specific Guidelines for Mentor Couples – Planning your Meetings

The following guidelines will assist you in developing a customized plan for your mentoring sessions to maximize your time together and achieve your mentoring goals.

- The first step is to hold an informal meeting with your engaged couple, perhaps over coffee, to get to know each other, discuss your engaged couple's hopes and dreams about marriage, and determine your goals for the mentoring relationship.
 - You may wish to use your first meeting to work together on your engaged couple's *Marriage Mentoring Plan* to specify your couple activities and the dates for your discussion sessions.
- One of the primary goals for mentoring will be to work through the 12-session video-based *Better Together* Marriage Preparation and Marriage Enrichment program with your engaged couple. This program will provide structure and content for your mentoring sessions.
 - To get the most out of your sessions, order your *Better Together Leader Guide* at <https://dynamiccatholic.com/better-together-leader-guide>). The *Leader Guide* is also available as a free download on the Better Together website - <https://files.dynamiccatholic.com/home/better-together/view-program/session/Better+Together+Leader+Guide.pdf>. For a complete set of resources including the *Leader Guide* we suggest the Program Pack for \$19.95 (<https://dynamiccatholic.com/better-together-program-pack>)
 - Each *Better Together* session contains 6 short videos (about 4-7 minutes), all available online for free on the *Better Together* website. The *Leader Guide* gives you all you need to facilitate your discussions with your engaged couple. Content of the *Leader Guide* is the same as the videos. Couple exercises are based on the content. You will complete the same couple exercises as your engaged couple and share and discuss your responses.
 - You will need to schedule at least four sessions to discuss the *Better Together* program. These sessions should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length.
 - Session 1 – Your discussion will be based on *Better Together* Sessions 1, 2 & 3: 1) God's Dream for Marriage, 2) Your Dreams for Marriage, 3) The Expectations Gap (pgs. 1-85 in *Leader Guide*)
 - Session 2 – BT Sessions 4, 5, 6: 4) 7 Levels of Intimacy, 5) Conflict is Inevitable, 6) Prayer and Spirituality (pgs. 86-179 in *Leader Guide*)
 - Session 3 – BT Sessions 7, 8, 9: 7) Sexuality, 8) Family, 9) Money (pgs. 180-269 in *Leader Guide*)
 - Session 4 – BT Sessions 10, 11, 12: 10) The Most Important Word in a Marriage (Forgiveness), 11) Better Every Day, 12) On the Day (Wedding Day), (pgs. 270-357 in *Leader Guide*)

- Each *Better Together* discussion session should begin and end in prayer. You can use the prayers provided in the *Leader Guide* on these pages: pgs. 24, 52, 97, 126, 234, 256, 278, 286, 296, 320)
- There are 39 couple reflection exercises throughout the *Better Together* program – any or all can be used for your discussion sessions (all found in *Leader Guide*)
- To enhance your BT discussion sessions, we suggest you refer to the Additional Resources section at the end of each session in the *Leader Guide* that include a brief reflection on marriage, appropriate paragraphs from the Catechism, a Scripture passage and a quote from a saint.
- Ask your engaged couple to come to each mentoring session with at least one question, comment or concern of theirs to be discussed.
- Other Mentoring Activities:
 - Prayer Partners – Mentors agree to pray for the intentions of your engaged couple and engaged agree to pray for the intentions of your mentors once a month using the Prayer Guide in your Better Together materials (pgs. 166-167 in Leader Guide).
 - Go on one double date – mentors and engaged couple. We suggest an outdoor activity if possible and for the men to plan the date. This date is just for fun and spending time together.
 - Meet after the engaged couple's Pre-Cana Retreat to discuss the experience. Engaged couple should be prepared with a list of three new things they learned about each other, and three questions about the retreat content.
 - Attend Sunday Mass together at your parish and offer at least one mass intention for your couple
 - Plan to attend at least one parish event together in each season, perhaps a Lenten event, an Advent event and some other parish activity or event; or join a parish bible study together
 - Touch base at least monthly by text or email to see how wedding plans are going, etc.
 - Attend the Theology Discussion Night (Catechetical Segment) for your engaged couple with their priest or deacon at the parish. If this is a private session and not a parish event, you may wish to host this at your home and include dinner or dessert.
 - Stay in touch with your engaged couple throughout the early years of marriage (send a Christmas card, First Anniversary card, etc.)