

Before 20<sup>th</sup> century:  
 Augustine: Sex = sinful.  
 Aquinas: Sex OK only if done for purpose of procreation.

**1910:** See “*Ius Decretalium*” by F.X. Wernz.

Marriage is a “contract” or “bond” [no mention of “relationship”]

Primary goal of contract = **children**.

Essential object of marital consent = **exchange of right to sex**.

**1930’s**

In “*Casti Cannubi*” (1930) Pius XI wrote: “This **mutual interior formation of husband and wife, this persevering endeavor to bring each other to the state of perfection, may in a true sense be called...the primary cause and reason of matrimony**, so long as marriage is considered not in its stricter sense as the institution designed for the procreation and education of children, but in the wider sense as the complete and intimate life-partnership and association.”

Pius XI was careful to not word his thoughts so they changed Canon 1013, i.e. that procreation and nurture of children are the primary end of marriage. But he did extend a quiet invitation to ponder marriage outside the limits of canon law.

Church decides to approve “rhythm method”...i.e. sex not only for procreation.

**In the 1930s**, German and French scholars began to think and write about marriage in ways that shift from **contract** to a **relationship of persons**: “...the **immediate purpose of marriage...is...one indivisible and indissoluble community of life in which they can fulfill and help one another....**It is the **source of health and sanctity**, and becomes for them the door to every natural and supernatural consummation. It tends also to the birth and education of new persons – their children...” Heribert Doms 1939.

**1944:** “In recent years a number of...articles...deny that the primary end of marriage is the generation of offspring...(the question is) whether this opinion...is admissible...Our response is...negative.” Congregation of the Holy Office, March 30, 1944.

**1965:** The ideas seemingly condemned in 1944 were incorporated into the Vatican II statement on marriage and approved by an overwhelming vote of the Church’s bishops: “...The intimate partnership of married life and love...is rooted in the conjugal consent of irrevocable person consent...by (which) spouses mutually bestow and accept each other...(forming) a **relationship**...for the **good of the spouses** and their **offspring** as well as of **society**...Authentic married love...can lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and can aid and strengthen them in the sublime office of being a father or a mother...by virtue of this sacrament...they increasingly **advance their own perfection, as well as their mutual sanctification**...” *Gaudium et spes*. Para 48. 1965.

Marriage becomes a **vocation**, i.e., a path of sanctity.

- 1983:** 1983 Code of Canon Law. Canon 1055 – “**The matrimonial covenant**, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a **partnership of the whole of life** and which is ordered by its nature for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.”
- 1994:** Catechism of the Catholic Church:  
Para. 1601. “**The matrimonial covenant**, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a **partnership of the whole of life** and which is ordered by its nature for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.” (Canon 1055 & The Church Today para 48.)  
Para. 1603. “The **intimate community of life and love** which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws....God himself is the author of marriage.” (The Church Today para.48.)

FOR PASTORS & REL. ED. TEACHERS.

**WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT? SACRAMENTALITY/SPIRITUALITY/INTIMACY REFERS TO THESE INTER-RELATED CONCEPTS:**

*NOTE: The following descriptions are not necessarily found in any dictionary nor are they meant to be mutually exclusive. Rather, these are one effort to describe elements of sacramental marriage that distinguish it from civil marriage. If a couple intends to establish and sustain a sacramental marriage the following elements are skills/habits they will learn to practice.*

1. **Sacramentality** means that the marriage relationship includes God/Jesus as an active member of the relationship. E.g. the spouses go **beyond** saying "*I love you*" to one another as a form of ongoing commitment to making a conscious effort to say "***I love you as God/Jesus loves you.***" The model/standard for loving one's spouse is not my personal idea about loving; rather the standard is God's own love. This can be "seen" in the acting out of specific Gospel values, such as, each spouse is willing to risk sharing his/her deepest thoughts and hopes and fears and listen effectively to one another, the willingness/ability to seek healing and reconciliation daily with and from one another, the ability to experience God/Jesus as an active partner/guide in the matters of daily life (couple/family prayer). The couple is confident that their personal efforts to love will be supported by God's grace. They are never left to fend for themselves.

2. **Spirituality** means that the concept of marriage as a "vocation" or "path of holiness" is part of the conscious awareness of the spouses. This element is seen in a conscious effort to make the relationship a priority that *supersedes*, for example, jobs, the role as parents, the needs of family and friends, and personal pleasures and comforts. While hormones, physical attraction and romance may have been the powers that initiated the relationship, it is the growth of the decision to do whatever it takes to make the relationship "work" that will result in a marriage that is not only "lifelong" but also "satisfying." Couples who have grown in spirituality are examples of "love is a conscious decision" to view their spouse as the *primary "neighbor" to love/serve*. (See: Marriage Encounter).

3. **Intimacy** means that the spouses understand not only the critical importance of love making and sexual intercourse for the health of their marriage, but also that they have taken the concept of intimacy further, so that:

1. They have done the homework as individuals and as a couple to "clean up" their ideas about sexuality and love making so that they experience every part of their bodies as good and holy, and they can offer themselves as sacred gifts to one another in love making.
2. They value physical love making and sexual intercourse, but they also know that the fullness of intimacy includes sharing their thoughts and joys and fears and struggles and hopes and dreams and weaknesses and sins.
3. Love and love making is always intertwined with the gift and responsibilities of fertility. A couple who is truly intimate will regularly dialogue on a question, such as, "*What is the most difficult thing for me to talk about with you?*", because they are realistic about the challenge of dealing with personal fears, inadequacies and differences.

## THE CONTENT TO BE TAUGHT

NOTE: While a specific target audience is *young married couples*, it is unlikely that we will get many of these couples into a course designed just for them. A course for young married couples may well be offered as a part of the parish plan to reach out to these couples. However, it is wiser to teach the needed content to EVERYONE in the parish (in age appropriate ways). **This is more likely to reach both the target audience and everyone else.**

The first three topics apply to everyone (not just married people) who claims to be a Christian. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that those who are married and those likely to be married at some point in the future have a special responsibility to live these values as part of their marriage vows.

1. Relationship/intimacy is the purpose of human existence and path of successful living for each person. THIS IS A MAJOR COUNTER-CULTURAL ISSUE. We are "trained" by society and family traditions to be individualists who are skilled at self preservation, personal security, doing my own thing, getting my personal needs met, and achieving my dreams. It is very difficult for us to choose the path of Gospel living (i.e. establishing intimate relationships with God and other people), not so much because we consciously reject intimate relationships, but rather because we have already been living deeply ingrained habits, which we learned from our family and society, which are *destructive* of relationships. In fact, we are attracted to relationships, but we tend to do all the wrong things when we try to establish and sustain an on-going relationship.

"Fixing" this problem will require a serious and objective critique of my family of origin to unlearn anti-relationship skills, learn healthy relationship skills, and re-set priorities and values and life goals.

Specific things to look at:

1. *Family meals* (without T-V and cell phones turned off, where spouses and children learn to talk and listen, practice good manners, pray together and make decisions together vs. solitary meals in front of TV).
2. *Family rituals of prayer and couple prayer.*
3. *Processes of family decision making and financial management, career planning, family responsibilities for each person, discipline of children, family goals*
4. *Decisions about fertility.*

**How are all of these realities shaped by our response to Jesus command to love God and love others?**

It used to be common practice for preachers to recommend pious practices as means for gaining "grace." It is possible that many Catholics today are not used to using the word "grace" and when the word is used today it may fail to "make contact" with the congregation. However, most folks are "starving" for lack of adequate *relationships and intimacy* and when we preach about these concepts

we make "contact" with the congregation...and if they "work at" better relationships with God and others they will be gaining "grace" even if they don't use the word!

2. Other people are to be treated as *equal in dignity* to one's self. From the very beginning of the Judeo-Christian tradition this is a clear and consistent teaching. Genesis 1:27 states: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them." Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." All are children of God; men and women are indeed *different* but *neither sex is of lesser dignity. We are to serve one another.* THIS IS ANOTHER MAJOR COUNTER-CULTURAL ISSUE. In spite of proclamations of freedom and equality in the Western world and civil legislation designed to enforce legal equality, prejudice and assumed inequality is standard behavior for most people. Most people have been taught to use power, prejudice, manipulation, secrets and seduction in dealing with others, even in relating to family members and friends. We are becoming sadly aware that, in far too many families, violence and abuse is so common that "home" is the opposite of a safe place. In fact most violence in our society *begins with domestic violence.*

Specific things to look at: Do I treat certain people (special friends, boss, etc) with greater regard and dignity than I treat my spouse and/or children? Do I rationalize the idea that my ideas are better than the ideas of others? Do I think that God created men with the right/responsibility to dominate women and children? Did God make women wiser than men? Do I deny or justify abusive behavior toward others (You made me angry!). Do I think that abusive language does not "count"? Is it really permissible to curse and swear just because "everybody else does it!"

3. Seeing my self as gift (child of God) and marriage as an opportunity to give and receive one another as greatest gifts/values rather than seeing the purpose of my life as a quest for money, fame, status over others. Specific things to look at: The critical importance of healthy self image because I cannot love another better than I can love myself. Abuse of others is projection of self hatred.

4. Mutual love of spouses is an essential element of marriage. Vatican Council II established a new definition of Christian marriage in *Gaudium at Spes* 47-52, this was later codified in canon 1055, "*The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring...*" The quality of the love relationship (the level of intimacy) is not an option (which can be left out) when a person vows sacramental marriage. *The love relationship must be adequate to establish and sustain the marriage for the "whole of life."* This kind of relationship recognizes the *spiritual equality of the spouses* and their capacity to enter into an agreement which *demands the gift of the whole person to another.* (See Canon 1055, Text & commentary)

To say the least. This definition is substantially different from the criteria for sacramental marriage which pre-dated Vatican Council II. Because this new definition of sacramental marriage is so radically

different from past practice, it is wise to acknowledge that this teaching has yet to be incorporated into praxis for most Catholics. The pastoral problem is made more difficult because ~ when people are "in love" ~ they tend to think they have achieved the goal of canon 1055 and assume they "already know" what we are trying to teach them. The sad reality is that the divorce rate in the Western world continually reminds us that most folks have little understanding of how to establish and sustain the kind of mutual love relationship that can support the challenges that every marriage will encounter.

Specific things to look at: It is very important to remind people that, in the past, marriage has been primarily for the *sake of children* (or other family/social values). A critical examination of conscious and unconscious attitudes and assumptions about this issue will assist people toward the awareness that they have never developed the skills to establish and sustain this kind of loving essential for lifelong marriage. The stereotype is that a man will place a high priority on "loving" a woman during the time of courtship (while he is "in love" with her), but once he is married he assumes that he has accomplished the goal of marriage and then he "moves on" to other priorities. But women are equally capable of failing to know how to engage in a mutual love relationship with a man as an equal partner beyond the phase of romantic love. Being "in love" can give the illusion of this kind of loving, but the phase of romantic love is usually finished by the time the marriage is just beginning! Every person (even those who decide not to marry) needs to learn that true love is radically different from the phenomenon of romantic love and will have to develop new skills in order to accomplish true love with other people. This is the heart of the Marriage Encounter weekend retreat, namely, to help married couples realize that their struggles in marriage are the result of false notions of love, and that they can learn to practice new methods of loving (sharing, listening, dialogue, forgiveness, acceptance of differences, etc.) Other sources for learning this information include Harville Hendrix's materials (e.g., *Keeping the Love you Find, A Personal Guide*) which are written for singles as well as married couples.

5. Marriage is a path of holiness (vocation), and married couples lead a life of *discipleship* (follow God/Jesus as the ultimate guide for self and for marriage).

Specific things to look at: How do I (we) seek God's will for self and for marriage? Do I (we) function as though our marriage IS an element of "building the Kingdom of God." What are my (our) concepts of holiness and are these to be found *in our home*.

6. "Right to marry" is not merely freedom from facts that would invalidate the marriage, it must also include the ability to create and sustain a specific kind of marriage, namely, sacramental marriage as defined in canon 1055. "Fidelity" is not merely abstaining from sex with others, but a *daily decision* to work at on-going intimacy with one's spouse so that the relationship can carry the couple through the challenges of married life.

Specific things to look at: What are my (our) daily practices of fidelity/intimacy?

## APPENDIX #3 – BULLETIN/PULPIT RESOURCES

### Bulletin Inserts:

1) Replace current information about Marriage ~ which may say something like “Contact the parish 6 months in advance” ~ with the following: *Marriage: Contact the church office for a packet of information about preparing for Christian marriage and planning your wedding. Obtain this packet even before you get engaged!*

2) Add a “helpful links” section to Bulletin & Parish web site. Include web addresses for the diocese & other recommended links and >> [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) .

### Pulpit Announcement:

So that we at [Holy Trinity] can better assist couples prepare for Marriage, we are seeking the assistance of married couples of our church who are willing to be trained to be “sponsors” for engage couples. [Our pastor] is asking for all married couples to consider serving in this important ministry.

After the married volunteers have taken part in a training course, they will be assigned to guide an engaged couple through a series of 5 meetings in their home.

We plan to train enough married couples so that each “sponsor couple” will minister to no more than 1 or 2 engaged couples per year.

Please contact [our pastor] for more information. Call [phone number of church office].

### Bulletin/Pulpit: Information Night for Those Considering Marriage in the Church.

"I believe we all agree on the importance and value of Christian marriage and family life. Because we at [Holy Trinity] are committed to help couples prepare well for a lasting and satisfactory Christian marriage, we are now offering an *Information Night for Those Considering Marriage in the Church*. The next Information Night is (date) at 7PM. This is for couples, singles, parents...anyone who wants to get information about marriage in the Church. We will explain [Holy Trinity's] marriage preparation process, answer questions you may have, and provide materials for couples to use for evaluating their relationship."

4-20-2010 Marriage Preparation Resources

## **APPENDIX #4 – HOW TO CELEBRATE YOUR MARRIAGE AT “St. Mary’s.”**

- 1) Contact the parish as soon as you are thinking about engagement or making wedding plans. Get a packet of information from the Parish Office. (There may be a fee for this packet....it may include 2 copies of *For Better and For Ever* and additional materials worth \$25.00 or more.)
  
- 2) When you are ready to set a wedding date, call the Parish Office to check for available dates. The parish secretary will “pencil in”<sup>1</sup> a date of your choosing and hold the date till you can meet with the pastor. The parish secretary will also discuss the fees that may need to be paid for the use of the church for the wedding, and any policy about providing “your own” priest/deacon as celebrant for the wedding. NOTE: This scheduling of the church does NOT mean a priest or deacon is automatically also scheduled.
  
- 3) Make an appointment with the pastor/associate pastor/deacon. You will be expected to prepare for this meeting using *For Better and For Ever* (See page 7).
  
- 4) After you have met with the pastor/associate pastor/deacon ~ which may be more than one meeting and may include a pre-marriage inventory, such as, FOCCUS or F.A.C.E.T.) ~ the pastor/associate pastor/deacon will confirm (“in ink”) your wedding date with the parish secretary.
  
- 5) After meeting with the pastor/associate pastor/deacon, you will complete the rest of marriage preparation program(s) that you agreed to in your meetings with the pastor/associate pastor/deacon. Typical programs are: Engaged Encounter, Sponsor Couple Program, and Natural Family Planning Course.

There is no specific amount of time required for marriage preparation, but feedback from engaged couples consistently confirms that they get the most out of the programs when they begin as far as possible in advance of their wedding date. *Plan to have completed the marriage preparation program 3-6 months prior to your wedding.*

### 4-20-2010 Marriage Preparation Resources

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<sup>1</sup> The point here is that the parish will hold this date for you, but it is NOT a formal agreement that the wedding will be celebrated in the church on that date unless and until you have met with the pastor and he has confirmed this date (“in ink”). We do this so you can prepare for your meeting with the pastor without being concerned about the whether or not the church is available for your wedding.



## **APPENDIX #5 – THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST/DEACON.**

1) WELCOMER. The couples see the clergy as the “gate keeper” to marriage in the Church. This means they are concerned that they may be excluded from marriage in the Church and will quickly become defensive and “closed” if they sense that the clergyman is likely to use power “over them.” It is critical for the clergyman to remember the Good Shepherd who is willing to go out of his way to search out and welcome the lost and even alienated sheep. The Good Shepherd avoids further alienating the anxious or lost sheep!!!

2) ASSESSMENT. The clergyman needs to be sure the couple is “free to marry” by the standards of Canon Law. In addition, he needs to determine other possible issues, such as, validation of a civil marriage, mixed religion marriage, stepfamily, etc. A good way to do this is to make sure the couple has For Better and For Ever / En las buenas y para siempre and follows the directions on page 7 to prepare for their first meeting with the clergyman.

3) PLANNING THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAM FOR THE COUPLE. Depending upon the needs of the couple, the clergyman and the couple will determine together the marriage preparation program.....which will likely include some or all of the following: FOCCUS or F.A.C.E.T., Sponsor Couple, Engaged Encounter, Natural Family Planning course. [1 – 3 can be done in one or two meetings with the couple]

4) COUPLE TAKES PART IN THE MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS.

5) MEETING WITH THE CLERGYMAN. While the couple is going through the marriage preparation program, they can be in touch with the clergyman so that any questions can be dealt with. There may not be a need for face to face meetings with the clergyman until they have completed the marriage preparation program(s). After they have completed the marriage preparation program(s) then they will meet again with the clergyman to complete any paperwork that has not already been done and complete the planning of the wedding ceremony. (see Handout #5)

6) PLANNING THE WEDDING CEREMONY. Some clergy will choose to be the facilitator for this planning; other clergy will delegate this responsibility to someone else in the parish trained to do this for the clergy. [AN OPTION: One way to collaborate with the couple is to encourage them ~ after they have selected the Scripture readings for their wedding ~ to write their personal thoughts about why they selected those particular readings for their wedding. Whether they write just a few lines or much more, their words can be used as the basis of the wedding homily. It is an easy way to “personalize” the homily and make it more focused on this particular couple.]

7) WEDDING REHEARSAL. Some clergy will choose to be the facilitator for the rehearsal; other clergy will delegate this responsibility to someone trained to do this for the clergy.

[These guidelines will require only 2 or 3 meetings with the priest/deacon because most of the meetings will be with other people.]

## APPENDIX #6 – RECRUITING / TRAINING / SUSTAINING SPONSOR COUPLES.

### 1) **A Plan for Recruiting potential sponsor/mentor couples from your church**

**community.** What would qualify a couple to be invited to become a sponsor/mentor couple? They need to be committed to their marriage and they need to be committed to living as Christians or ~ as one couples wisely put it ~ they need to be “in love with one another and in love with the Church.” The rest of what they need to know can be provided by training. [There are notes from the video/DVD "How to set up a marriage preparation program in your church."] See >

[http://www.marriagepreparation.com/Resources\\_for\\_using.htm](http://www.marriagepreparation.com/Resources_for_using.htm)

**2) Training prospective Sponsor Couples.** The training videos/DVDs are the best way to help prospective sponsor couples understand how to function in this ministry. Couples can view the videos/DVDs on their own time before taking part in a training workshop by the parish/diocese.

**3) Certification of Sponsor Couples by Diocesan Family Life Office.** Everyone will benefit if there is diocesan oversight of the sponsor couple program. Many pastors prefer that the diocesan Family Life Office conduct training sessions so that the training is consistent (rather than each parish being left to design their own training process). When the Family Life Office keeps a listing of trained Sponsor Couples ~ and is able to communicate with these couples (usually by email) ~ it can help the parishes make better use of sponsor couples. (Some parishes may have more than they need and some may need to ask for assistance.)

### 4) **Sustaining the Sponsor Couple Program.**

- While the sponsor couple program often seems to “run itself,” it is important for the parish and the diocese to plan for regular/periodic continuing education/formation of sponsor couples. At least every 6 months, there should be a parish/deanery/diocesan gathering of sponsor couples for some kind of enrichment.
- Parishes (and dioceses) that have the most successful sponsor couples programs tend to be the ones where high commitment is expected and where the commitment is formalized by some kind of “certification” process that must be periodically updated.
- A yearly celebration of Marriage & Family Life at the Cathedral with the Bishop presiding can highlight couples who serve as Sponsor Couples.
- Recruitment must be on-going and sponsor couples need to be involved in the recruiting efforts of the pastoral staff.

## **APPENDIX #7 – RESOURCES for Pastors & Lay Leaders.**

**1 – For Better and For Ever / En las buenas y para siempre.** See web site at [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) for more information and how to order materials.

### **2 – Family of Origin and dialogue/communication/intimacy**

- Keeping the Love you Find - Harville Hendrix
- Hendrix's web site > <http://gettingtheloveyouwant.com/articles/imago-dialogue-101>
- The Five Love Languages - Chapman

### **3 – Couples prayer & Family Prayer**

- When Couples Pray Together – Stoop
- Reminders of God – Grizzle
- The Blessing Cup – Rock Travnikar

### **4 – Natural Family Planning.**

- In the Name of Love – Catholic Organization for Life and Family (Canada)
- Family Planning: A Guide for Exploring the Issues – Charles & Beth Balsam

### **5 - Interfaith / Interchurch Marriage**

- See [www.marriagepreparation.com/InterChurchANDInterFaith.htm](http://www.marriagepreparation.com/InterChurchANDInterFaith.htm) for more information and links to support groups. See especially > [www.naiifonline.org](http://www.naiifonline.org)
- Celebrating Our Differences – Mary Helen & Stan Rosenbaum (He is a Jew and she is a Catholic).

### **6 – PreMarital Inventories.**

- FOCCUS (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study) is probably the best known > [www.foccusinc.com](http://www.foccusinc.com)
- F.A.C.E.T. (Foundations Applied Conversation & Education Tool) is a new product that may be better designed to address contemporary pastoral challenges > <http://facetsite.com/index.html>

## WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE CONTENT FOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION?

**QUESTION?** How is the appropriate 'content to be taught' in a marriage preparation program determined? Are there some church documents which spell out the essentials of Marriage Preparation?

**Answer:** Concerning the Content of marriage preparation programs.

From the beginning of Pre Cana up through 1995, the content of marriage preparation programs was completely flexible because every priest/parish/diocese was trying to design programs that would minister to the needs of the couples they were assisting. No "Catechism for Matrimony" (approved text) had ever been produced because there was no clear consensus about the content. By the 1970s, the leaders of the Pre Cana efforts knew that the vast majority of divorced couples claimed that the reason for their divorce was that they were "incompatible" and every marriage preparation program was trying to help engaged couples determine whether, in fact, they were "incompatible" in spite of their current insistence that their deep love for each other was proof that they were "compatible." The Pre Cana programs focused on "communication" because they thought that this could help engaged couples determine whether, in fact, they were actually "incompatible" and ~ once they understood this ~ would agree to cancel or postpone their wedding plans.

In the mid-1970s, the impact of Marriage Encounter on Pre Cana was dramatic. The content and process of the Marriage Encounter weekends was successful because they used "ordinary married couples" (witness model) to share very specific skills (dialogue) which help married couples to deepen their commitment (the Sacrament of Matrimony) by living a counter-cultural life style. The Engaged Encounter weekends were the first and most obvious adaptation of Marriage Encounter to the needs of Engaged Couples. The feed-back of engaged couples and the married "team couple" was so positive that many pastoral leaders thought ~ in those days ~ that Engaged Encounter was the "final solution" to the challenge of marriage preparation. Even today the Engaged Encounter is widely regarded at the "best" marriage preparation program. A concern, however, is that Engaged Encounter has no way to "follow-up" with the couples after their weekend experience.

Meanwhile, beginning in the late 1970s, the field of psychology was learning more about "family systems theory" (Bowen & Friedman) and Harville Hendrix was developing his "Imago theory." These ideas began to influence those searching for better ways to prepare engaged couples for the reality of married life when they grew beyond romantic love and had to learn to deal with the fact that "wanting to do well in marriage" was not enough, especially when they were struggling with the fear that the person they were married to was "different" from the person they fell in love with. Married couples were struggling to make their marriages better, but too often their efforts to make the marriage better seemed to only make matters worse! The role of the *family of origin* in all of this was only beginning to be understood and it was yet to become a topic in marriage preparation programs! The first marriage preparation program introduce the topic of the role of the family of origin was *For Better and For Ever* in 1989.

In 1995, the publication of “MARRIAGE PREPARATION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: *Getting it Right*” (*Report of a Study on the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church for Couples Married One through Eight Years. Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University*) included the following listing of the content of the known marriage preparation program at that time. **Note that family of origin is not listed as a topic of study:**

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[the following is copied from the 1995 Report by Creighton University]

The table below tabulates the various content areas covered in marriage preparation programs, the **Number** of times the topic was listed and the **%** of programs in which the topic is addressed. It shows that, with the exception of dual career marriage and drug and alcohol issues, each of these areas is covered in the majority of programs (80% plus).

**Three of the top four content areas covered in the majority of programs dealt with communications, commitment and conflict.** The fourth, not surprisingly given the administration of programs by the Church, is the role of religion and values. **The relatively low coverage (75-80%) of issues connected with balancing home and career and dual career marriage is of some concern, given the increasing stress placed on families by career-related issues.**

Content	Number	%
communications	1,127	93.1%
role of religion and values	1,124	92.9%
commitment	1,105	91.3%
conflict resolution	1,100	90.9%
children	1,093	90.3%
roles in marriage	1,069	88.3%
sex and intimacy	1,069	88.3%
marriage sacraments	1,068	88.3%
personality issues	1,061	87.7%
finances	1,056	87.3%
family planning	1,055	87.2%
friends	1,035	85.5%
extended family	1,032	85.3%
compatibility of background	1,031	85.2%
leisure activities	1,021	84.4%
balancing home and career	972	80.3%
dual career marriages	913	75.5%
drugs-alcohol	847	70.0%

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In 1998 *For Better and For Ever, Unitas, and Perspectives on Marriage* were the first programs to publish a text that included the appropriate content to be taught. Each of these programs attempts to address the issue of the role of the family of origin and how that will “play out” in marriage. In addition, *For Better and For Ever* has an on-going process for collecting feedback from sponsor couples and engaged couples and uses this feedback to improve the content with each new printing. In addition, the web site at [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) provides additional content, email addresses and phone numbers for support and/or clarification about the content (this service is free!).

Since 1998, additional efforts to design new/better programs have continued. The result is a large number of programs that are significantly different from one another and each claim to be “the best.” If a person is new to the task of selecting a marriage preparation program, it is difficult to know how to determine what program to select.

One tool to use in the selection process is to consider the CONTENT. At a minimum, a program should contain ALL of the content that was studied in the 1995 Report by Creighton University (see above) PLUS the family of origin. If a program does not adequately address all of those topics, it may have good qualities, but it is not an adequate program. Note: Analysis of the content is not the only tool to use because the process of how content is dealt with is equally if not more important. But if a program does not address all the important topics, the pastoral leaders will have to determine how to supply what is missing and this adds to the challenge of marriage preparation.

In addition to the marriage preparation program, engaged couples are encouraged to take an introductory course on Natural Family Planning. If additional courses/topics are added, some/many of the engaged couples will begin to find the marriage preparation process too demanding. The 1995 study of Creighton University noted that there can be “too little” marriage preparation, but there can also be “too much”...at which point the good intentions of the marriage preparation leaders become counter-productive.

In 2009, the US Bishops’ Pastoral on marriage ~ *Marriage, Love and Life in the Divine Plan* ~ was formally approved by the US Bishops in November 2009. This document calls for marriage preparation programs to include relevant theology and doctrine from Vatican Council II (See pages 9 – 11 of Pastoral Issues of Marrying & Tips for Pastoral Ministers) and affirms the value of using mentors (sponsor couples) during the time of immediate preparation for marriage. The theological content called for in the Pastoral letter has already been incorporated into *For Better and For Ever*.