

Witness to Love: Marriage Formation Announcement

Often, parishioners don't have a chance to see the "behind-the-scenes" work of the priest or those involved with pastoral care. The only encounter with Fr. Fleck many might have is for that one hour on Sunday during Mass. While there are many ministries here at St. Joseph and St. Mary. I would like to take this opportunity to talk with you more about how we prepare couples for marriage. As we move forward, many more of our parishioners will have the chance to help serve our formation couples as they prepare to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony.

This is particularly relevant, as our late Pope Francis called upon the entire Catholic community to support those preparing for marriage in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. In our Diocese, a couple seeking marriage must approach the priest or deacon in the parish at least (6 months) prior to the date of the wedding. The reason for this is to give the couple adequate time to discern the Sacrament of Marriage. However, it is best for the couple to approach the priest or church at least a year in advance, before any deposits are made. The reason for this extended period of time is that six months can feel rushed. Generally, at our first meeting, I tell the couple that it is best if we can finish the marriage formation at least two months before the date of the wedding. This allows the couple to focus on the wedding day and spending time with family.

Beginning this year of 2026, we will begin to utilize Witness to Love in our parish. We are excited to introduce this new initiative because it can deeply transform marriages, families, and our community. We would like to share the Mission of Witness to Love: "Witness to Love leads the renewal of formation and support for the Sacrament of Matrimony through a catechumenal approach rooted in mentoring, friendship, and virtue. We equip the Church to make disciples by directing engaged and married couples and their chosen mentors along a journey of vocation, faith, and belonging to Jesus Christ in His Church."

What makes Witness to Love unique is that the engaged couple chooses their own mentor couple—one they admire and see as a source of faith formation. This mentor couple gives them a concrete connection and integration into the parish. Through the sharing of the mentor couple's own marriage journey, the engaged couple inherits a "lifeline" of support in their commitment to Jesus and His Church.

As we begin to offer this new method of forming couples, we anticipate that mentors will experience a reinvigoration in their own marriages as they work alongside their mentees in growing in virtue. It is our prayer that all of our parishioners, watching these couples grow in their faith and readiness to receive this sacrament from the pews week by week, will begin to see that we are all part of one another's formation.

WITNESS TO LOVE COUPLE'S ROADMAP

RENEWING THE CHURCH THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

Welcome! The Couple's Roadmap below illustrates the typical Witness to Love marriage preparation process. Parishes and dioceses are encouraged to customize these steps based on individual needs.

