

MARRIAGE CATECHUMENATE

“Get Started” Parish Training Guide



Office of Family Life & Discipleship
Familylifeoffice@lincolndiocese.org



To the Clergy of the Diocese of Lincoln,

The Office of Family Life & Discipleship has created a *Marriage Catechumenate Hub* that can answer majority of your questions. This website offers a “Parish Implementation Checklist”, FAQs, and lists all the forms you need that will you get started.

Start here:

1. Review the **Marriage Catechumenate Hub**
2. Choose your parish model (Witness to Love, FOCCUS Facilitator Couples, or your own model)
3. Begin with your next engaged couple

For parish resources, forms, and retreats for parish staff and volunteers (including the FREE Be More Marriage Formation Retreat), please share the Marriage Catechumenate webpage.

SCAN THE QR CODE -->



All forms are also categorized on the newly updated **Clergy Resources on Teams**. (i.e., forms for clergy include canonical and clergy checklists, forms for couples includes registration forms, brochures and couple checklists) If you have any questions, please refer to this [contact sheet](#) that will help you know who to contact with any questions you may have.

Thank you for your patience as we roll-out the Marriage Catechumenate in our Diocese,

Rachael Tvrdy

Director of Family Life and Discipleship

3700 Sheridan Blvd, Ste 7

Lincoln, NE, 68506

Direct: 402-473-0621

[Catholic Diocese of Lincoln](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 PARISH
IMPLEMENTATION
CHECKLIST

5 FAQ

9 TEAM MEETING
TEMPLATE

10 TRAINING &
RESOURCE LINKS

Marriage Catechumenate - Parish Implementation Checklist

Parish: _____

Marriage Formation Coordinator: _____

Additional Team Volunteers: _____

Target Launch Date: _____

Getting Started

Please review the [Diocesan Marriage Catechumenate Guidelines](#) for diocesan requirements and timeline expectations. To track each couple's progress, use the [Marriage Preparation Record Checklist \(for Standard Preparation & Convalidations\)](#).

Step 1: Parish Discernment

- ☐ Review the Get Started Parish Training Guide for Clergy & Parish Leaders
- ☐ Decide which lay accompaniment model your parish will use and get trained
 - ☐ Option A: [Witness to Love Mentor Couples](#)
 - ☐ Option B: Premarital Inventory Facilitator Couples

(You have freedom to use both options if you have lay couples serving in both areas).
- ☐ If considering Witness to Love, order a [Parish Review Pack](#) to evaluate the program
- ☐ Start small: focus first on identifying a [Marriage Formation Coordinator](#) (primary point of contact who guides couples and supports mentor couples). (If you have less than five weddings a year, you may qualify for a virtual coach instead through the [WTL Hybrid Experience](#). It is best used as a *temporary bridge* not a longterm solution. The cost is \$195 per couple, vs \$115).
- ☐ Determine who will administer the premarital inventory (FOCCUS or approved alternative) - clergy or trained facilitator couple

Step 2: Parish Training

If using Witness to Love:

- ☐ Priest or parish marriage formation coordinator completes [the Witness to Love training videos](#) (1 hr) on the new learning platform. To learn how to use the platform, [click here](#).

- ☐ Complete the [Clergy Short Course](#) (Clergy Only)
- ☐ Schedule a call with a Witness to Love Parish Support Representative if needed or email parishsupport@witnessstolove.org. You may also review WTL's [Help & Support \(FAQ\) page](#)

If using FOCCUS (or another pre-marital inventory) for lay accompaniment:

- ☐ Train a facilitator couple to facilitate the pre-marital inventory instead of clergy
 - ☐ [FOCCUS Facilitator Training Modules](#) (\$95 reduced rate until July 1, 2026)
Self-paced videos; 4-5 hrs total)

Step 3: Build Your Parish Marriage Formation Team

Mentor couples do not need to be recruited by the pastor - they are chosen organically by engaged couples (5 years married or more, someone they admire, active/good standing Catholic)

- ☐ For High Volume Wedding Parishes: Recruit mentor couples (WTL) to serve as **showcase couples** (a pool of vetted couples a couple can choose from if they have no options or no one to ask) in large, high volume wedding parishes OR facilitator couples

(Note: the best practice is that the couple still chooses their own mentor couple from someone they know/admire, so showcase couples are a back-up option in case they know no one, not the standard practice. Mentor couples do not need to be trained; they are coached by the Marriage Formation Coordinator at the initial mentoring meeting with the engaged couple.

- ☐ Ensure parish staff and volunteers understand the new marriage preparation process. A [Marriage Catechumenate Hub](#) was created for parish volunteers to watch the diocesan information webinar, review forms, and listen to a pastor's testimony.

Step 4: Parish Preparation + First Team Meeting

- ☐ Hold your first Marriage Formation Team meeting with clergy, marriage formation coordinator, wedding coordinator if you have one. Showcase couples/FOCCUS couples are not needed; but you may communicate or invite them if you wish. You may use the Get Started Parish Guide as a meeting template.
- ☐ For High Volume Wedding Parishes: The Marriage Formation Coordinator coaches showcase couples or facilitator couples to be stand-in coaches (to train the facilitator couples, have them watch the Coaching Session training module in Witness to Love Dashboard)
- ☐ (Optional) Provide formation resources for showcase couples (e.g., Mentor's Journey or encourage them to watch Beloved on Formed or the free "Be More Marriage Retreat"). You may also offer your coordinator [The Road to Family Missionary Discipleship](#) book as a gift.

Step 5: Parish Launch

- ☐ Announce the Marriage Catechumenate to the parish:
 - ☐ Choose a Launch Sunday to make a pulpit announcement at every Sunday mass; if you have a parish formation coordinator they can help share announcementsUse

bulletin announcements, Flocknote, or parish communications to make a general announcement (“You may be asked to be a mentor couple...”) or to find more volunteers

Step 6: Working with Engaged Couples

- ☐ Initial meeting with clergy - tells couple to choose a mentor couple using guidelines
- ☐ Couple selects mentor couple of their choice (if using Witness to Love)
- ☐ Marriage Formation Coordinator schedules first coaching session with engaged couple and mentor couple at the Marriage Formation Coordinator’s home
- ☐ Clergy or facilitator couple begins premarital inventory process (recommended prior to retreat)
- ☐ Couple completes Engaged Encounter Retreat or approved formation course (serving as a key moment of discernment within formation)
- ☐ Mentor couple and engaged couple meet 6x (ideally, once every 3-4 weeks) for Witness to Love Mentoring, and additional sessions for premarital inventory facilitation
- ☐ Clergy conducts a “Theology of Marriage” pastoral check-in with the engaged couple (post-retreat) to confirm readiness and understanding of the Church’s teaching on marriage
 - ☐ If using Witness to Love, this occurs during Session 5: Theology of Marriage Discussion Night (shared meal after the retreat; see WTL Dashboard “Resources”)
 - ☐ For inactive, poorly formed, or lapsed Catholics, use the [“This We Believe: Prayers and Teaching of the Catholic Church”](#) pamphlets or find it under Convalidations & Complex Situations on Clergy Resources

Step 7: Post-Wedding Support

- ☐ Mentor couples stay connected with the newly married couple (informal expectation; the hope is they continue their friendship/support 1-3 years after the wedding)
- ☐ Invite newlyweds to parish events or small groups
- ☐ Encourage participation in diocesan [marriage enrichment opportunities](#)

START HERE: Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. What lay accompaniment program should I use?

The Diocese of Lincoln requires one form of parish-based lay accompaniment under its new policy. **Lay accompaniment** is an umbrella term describing married couples walking alongside couples. The Diocese endorses **Witness to Love** or **trained inventory facilitator couples** as approved models of lay accompaniment.

2. How do I use both Witness to Love and FOCCUS?

If you use Witness to Love, completion of a premarital inventory is still required. Please refer to the joint [resource document](#), created by Witness to Love and FOCCUS which outlines how to use the two together. FOCCUS is a premarital inventory that's intended to spot areas of disagreement. Witness to Love is peer-to-peer mentoring for long-term support and bridging into the parish. These tools are **not interchangeable**, but they are designed to work together. Witness to Love fulfills the lay accompaniment requirement. FOCCUS or completion of another approved premarital inventory remains a requirement for assessing readiness. Clergy may facilitate if your parish already uses mentor couples.

3. How do I get trained in Witness to Love?

a) If you wish to be trained in Witness to Love, please click: [Certification Training](#) on the Witness to Love Store. The cost is \$45. Also available in Spanish.

b) If you are still in discernment, please order a [free Parish Review Pack](#) here.

c) After you are trained, the WTL Parish Support Team will reach out to follow up, answer any questions, and schedule a check-in within 3 months of training. For immediate customer service, please contact parishsupport@witnessstolove.org

4. How do I train a couple in FOCCUS?

FOCCUS is offering our diocese a 50% off discount of \$95 (vs the regular \$195) for [virtual facilitator training](#) until July 1, 2026. This discount will be applied automatically. The new facilitators will get a new FOCCUS account set up, plus a training manual shipped to them.

5. What is the difference between mentor couples vs. “facilitator couples”? Do we need both?

a) **Mentor couples** is a specific term used by Witness to Love.

b) **Facilitator couple** is a term specific to facilitating pre-marital inventories, i.e., FOCCUS.

c) In order to avoid confusion: it is recommended to keep the terms specific.

d) Note: A **FOCCUS Facilitator Couple** may act as a “coach” to overview the Witness to Love initial coaching session.

6. Who is the Marriage Formation Coordinator? What do they do?

The [Marriage Formation Coordinator](#) is recruited by the pastor to offer overall coordination of Witness to Love at the parish level. Their primary job is to coach the engaged couples and mentor couples in the overall process. They meet once with them both for a “coaching session” (1 hour) and give an overview of the process. They also register the couple, keep track of the couples (via the learning platform), and are on stand-by to answer questions. This is not the same as the mentor couple role.

7. Why does the Diocese only require an NFP Intro Course and not mandate the full course? Are pastors allowed to mandate it at the parish level?

Very few dioceses across the United States mandate the full NFP course, and our Diocese has historically never mandated the full course due to lack of instructors and compliance amongst users. Yes, the pastor does have wide discretion to mandate the full course (3-5 follow-up sessions after the intro course) under the parish policy. A great resource is [NFP Basics](#), a short course for couples, which statistics show 70% who participate end up signing up for the full NFP course.

8. What are the requirements? What is encouraged, but not required?

The clear requirements are listed under [Clergy Record Checklist](#), listed on Clergy Resources. Please implement a structure that is both flexible and adaptable to your local parish needs, which is why our policy allows pastoral discretion.

9. How do I make Witness to Love widely known in my parish?

You can purchase a [WTL Parish Promotional Packet](#) (50 for \$60, 100 for \$86, or 150 for \$141); includes bulletin/pulpit announcements, brochures, pew cards, daily examen prayer for couples. Or you can write your own announcements.

10. What about convalidations and irregular cases?

An updated [Convalidations Guide](#) and a [Clergy Checklist for Convalidations](#) is listed on Clergy Resources under "Forms for Clergy."

11. Is Engaged Encounter required for everyone?

Engaged Encounter remains the standard retreat option under diocesan policy. However, approved exceptions are permitted for convalidations and other exceptions due to work, illness, childcare, age, or distance. In these cases, couples may fulfill the retreat requirement through an approved virtual, hybrid, or alternative formation option, as outlined in the Convalidations Guide.

The free option to replace Marriage 2.0 or as an alternative for couples who can't attend EE is **Be More Marriage Formation Retreat**. You can receive instructions to register for free on the [Convalidations Guide](#) or Marriage Catechumenate webpage.



Marriage Catechumenate Workshop
Office of Family Life & Discipleship

In-Depth Planning Template for First Team Meeting:

Parish(s): _____

Lay Leaders / Mentor Couples Involved: _____

Part 1: Current Landscape

1. What is your parish's current process for marriage preparation?

2. What strengths does your parish already have that can support the catechumenate model? (e.g., mentor couples, active ministries, hospitality team)

3. What challenges or obstacles do you anticipate?

Part 2: Mapping the Four Stages

Stage 1: Reception (initial contact / welcome / evangelization)

Main Goal: How will we make couple feel welcome and introduce them to the parish?

1. How will we welcome couples? (letter from parish, Rite of Presentation, tour of parish/introduction to staff, etc.)

2. How will we check-in on their walk with Christ? Will you share your testimony?

3. How will we introduce them to the parish community and mentors? (i.e., coaching meeting, Rite of Presentation, invite to parish events, Flocknote, etc.)

Stage 2: Catechumenal Phase (Primary formation; building trust & lay accompaniment)

Main Goal: How will we form couples practically, theologically, and relationally?

1. Which “lay accompaniment model” will we use?

Option 1: Witness to Love _____

Option 2: Premarital Facilitator Couples: _____

2. Who will serve as facilitator couples if you use them? _____

Note: FOCCUS facilitator couples often serve as a “**second mom or father**” and help fulfill a “wisdom gap.” Can you name couples who could potentially serve in this role?

3. **Schedule a Pastoral Follow-Up Conversation** (to replace the Private Catechesis of Marriage) or the Theology of Marriage Dinner Discussion Night (Session 5: Witness to Love) How will we check-in on their walk with Christ? _____

4. Our diocesan policy requires **one NFP Intro Course (virtual or in-person)**. The pastor can require couples to take the full NFP course (3-5 sessions depending on the method) and has wide discretion to do so, if they choose under their parish policy.

Fertility Awareness Intro Session (do you have a _____
Fertility Instructor in your parish you can refer to?)
Will you require follow-up sessions?

Stage 3: Final Preparation (synthesis and pastoral/spiritual formation)

Main Goal: How will we form couples spiritually and pastorally in the last 60 days?

- Couple's Prayer (will mentor couples' model this?): _____

- Liturgy planning/ Lectio divina with wedding readings _____

- Confession (when?): _____

Stage 4: Mystagogy (post-wedding accompaniment)

How will we continue *walking with the couple after the wedding*? What option seems most feasible to do at the parish level?

Is there a point person or couple who would want to get small groups started for married couples?

Part 3: Equipping the Team + Parish Launch

1. Who is a potential marriage formation coordinator? (Volunteer coordinator, staff, etc.)

Note: Parishes with less than 5 weddings/yr. qualify for a virtual WTL coordinator/coach.

2. Who are potential showcase mentor couples? (vetted couples on the side if an engaged couple doesn't know anyone?)

3. What is a good team meeting structure? (Quarterly check-in/potlucks for team fellowship, pulpit announcements – “Launch Sunday”)

4. Who are local partners that will help us? (nearby parishes, PCCW, Knights, MSHF, etc.)

Clickable Resource List:

Lay Accompaniment - Training Links:

- [Witness to Love Certification Training](#) - If you wish to be trained in Witness to Love, please click: Certification Training | Parish Connect | Witness to Love

If you are still in discernment, please order a free Parish Review Pack [here](#).

- [FOCCUS Online Facilitator Training](#) - \$95 until July 1, 2026, normal price is \$195 (50% discount applied if you use this link) Indicate "Diocese of Lincoln" to get discount.

Convalidations Resources:

- [Civil Marriage Initiative Starter Kit – Witness to Love](#)
- [FOCCUS Convalidations Inventory and Booklets](#)

Mystagogy Resources:

Witness to Love - Be Light Marriage Enrichment Small Groups: for the first 5 years of marriage and beyond; a continuation and intentional pathway to become Evangelizing Spouses (will be fully available soon)

Missionaries of the Holy Spirit & the Family: for the growing and mature disciple, a "seminary-like" two-year formation for married couples done at the parish level and in the home; contact **Chance and Lora Unger** at mhsfonline@gmail.com

Love & Life Programs: for ongoing marriage enrichment; nine programs focusing on tools, workshops, and small group follow-up; contact **Matt and Marie Philips** (Hastings, NE) for more information for programs throughout the Diocese: loveandlifeprograms.nebraska@gmail.com

The Rule of St. John Paul II Married Small Groups – small group leaders training available; for conjugal spirituality recommended for the early years, written by St. John Paul II, a rule of life for married couples.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter - for ongoing marriage enrichment; offers tools, dialogue, and workshops over a retreat weekend and ongoing small groups

Retrouvaille of Nebraska - for couples in crisis or renewal; 3 phases of support via retreat & small groups; contact nebraskaretrouvaille@gmail.com for more info

Missionary Families of Christ (formerly Couples for Christ based out of the Philippines) - for all stages of family life; seminars and small groups; contact **Celso and Salve Alikpala** (630-340-0222) to bring a Christian Life Seminar to the Diocese

—

—