

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

FROM THE DIOCESE OF ORANGE MARRIAGE CATECHUMENATE SUMMIT ON FEBRUARY 15, 2025

Part 1: Pre-catechumenal “Remote” Preparation (Early Development & Family)

Current Landscape

- Youth and young adults often lose their way due to distractions and a fast-paced life.
- Social media has a big impact on youth and youth relationships; many (young) people turn to social media for communication and information, or even to escape.
- The "feel good culture" and emotion-driven society impact faithful and authentic human formation.
- The high cost of living in Orange County affects parents' ability to spend quality time with their children, let alone on faith formation of their children.
- Many children grow up in single-parent homes.
- Many parents are interfaith (mixed marriages) with varying degrees of commitment to Catholic faith formation of their children.

Reasons for Concern

- Parishes vary in priority, capacity, and resources for faith formation. There is some recognition of the need to incorporate more family-based catechesis or remote preparation for marriage but uncertainty on how to do so. Parishes are not investing enough in programs to form young married couples and parents, and there are challenges in promoting these programs effectively.
- Young people lack access to models of healthy relationships and mature faith, face confusion around marriage, gender, and sexuality, and often do not receive or are uninterested in Church teachings.
- There is a tendency to just "check the boxes" in faith formation and sacramental prep processes, with a lack of follow-up or integration into parish life.
- Many parents lack formation, making them ill-equipped to form their children, which impacts the overall faith journey of families.
- Catholic families often do not practice their faith, prioritizing sports and other activities. Scheduling programs is a challenge with busy lives. Confirmation preparation is seen as unengaging, competing with other activities.

Goal-setting with Graduality

- **Integration of Marriage Topics:** Incorporate marriage topics throughout all sacramental preparation and faith formation programs.

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- **Parental Involvement:** Engage parents in faith formation activities while their children are in formation, creating opportunities for parents to learn and grow, and building a community of parents.
- **Resource Sharing and Collaboration among parishes:** Promote sharing of resources and ideas between parishes, designating specific parishes to focus on certain strengths and events; avoid silos.
- **Mentorship and Evangelization:** Encourage mentorship programs for young couples and families, use tools like Alpha for evangelization, and involve married couples in sacramental preparation.
- **Practical Formation:** Offer practical formation programs for parents on topics like communication and phone use, mental and relational health.
- **Community Building:** Foster fellowship events to build relationships and community, create small groups based on neighborhoods, and offer consistent opportunities for ministries to share struggles and successes.
- **Young Adult Family Engagement:** Engage young adults and families in faith activities, provide dating ministries, and address the needs of younger couples and young moms or dads.

Part 2: Pre-catechumenal, Intermediate “Proximate” Preparation (Young Adulthood)

Current Landscape

- A significant percentage of young adults raised Catholic do not attend church regularly. Catholic young adults often attend church events but are not loyal to one parish. Median age of youth who “check out” of the faith is 13.
- Couples are getting engaged and married later in life, with fewer choosing to marry at all.
- Differences in life stages within this age cohort (18-39) fracture community and friendships, with some feeling left behind by their peers or even judged. Loneliness is pervasive.
- Distractions like social media, video games, and porn; wounds from broken families of origin or from affective and sexual experiences all impact young adults’ ability to form healthy mature relationships or grow in faith.

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Reasons for Concern

- There is a lack of attractive role models in the Church, and young people are influenced more by social media than by family or faith community, leading to issues with self-awareness and identity.
- Many young people are content to cohabitate, ignorant of the great gift of marriage.

Goal-setting with Graduality

- **Encounter with Christ:** Shift the focus from information to personal encounters with Christ, and provide accompaniment in all sacraments.
- **Community and Relationship Building:** Create meaningful community activities, service projects, and opportunities for young adults to build friendships and discern marriage, including retreats. Make personal invitations to young adults.
- **Engaging Influencers:** Utilize Catholic influencers and ministries like FOCUS.
- **Healing Ministries:** Offer specific ministries for men, women, and family healing.
- **Support and Promotion:** Ensure parish-level support and promotion of all events and programs, and communicate in a way that resonates with young people.
- **Parish Involvement:** Intentionally involve young adults in parish life, such as on parish councils, and offer social activities to attract a wider audience.
- **Collaboration and Stability:** Foster collaboration among parishes, deaneries, and the diocese, and establish stable positions for young adult ministry staff.

Part 3: Catechumenal “Proximate” and “Immediate” Preparation (Dating & Engaged Couples)

Current Landscape

- **Focus on Logistics Over Sacrament:** Many engaged couples are more focused on wedding logistics and paperwork rather than the sacrament itself, finding the process lengthy and cumbersome.
- **Cohabitation is the norm:** Many couples are already living together before marriage preparation, sometimes showing little interest in formation.
- **Interfaith Marriages:** Catholics marrying non-Catholics is common.
- **Lack of Understanding that Marriage is a Covenant:** There is a general lack of understanding that marriage is a covenant, with some couples viewing marriage

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prep as merely obtaining a certificate. Many couples do not fully understand or take the time to discern the vocation of marriage.

Reasons for Concern

- **Inconsistencies in Sacramental Preparation:** Parishes vary significantly in how they conduct sacramental preparation. Premarital programs across the diocese are inconsistent, often due to differing access to resources and committed manpower. There is a need for parishes to support each other.
- **Need/challenge of customizing preparation:** Couples who are already living together or civilly married are put through the same preparation process as newly engaged couples, which may not address their specific needs.
- **Healing and Freedom to Marry:** Couples need to be directed toward healing from wounds and addictions, such as pornography, to achieve true freedom to marry.
- **Support from Clergy:** Some pastors do not fully support the marriage prep process, wanting to expedite it so as not to discourage couples from marrying in the Church. This undercuts marriage prep as an opportunity for evangelization and formation.

Goal-setting with Graduality

- **Accepting Current Realities:** Work within the reality of couples coming with set dates and venues, simplifying the registration process while gradually shifting the focus from the wedding date to preparing for marriage through accompaniment.
- **Focus on Vocation:** Emphasize the end goal of marriage preparation as fulfillment of one's vocation, not just obtaining a certificate.
- **Personal Encounter with Christ:** Incorporate personal encounter retreats and spiritual development activities, encouraging couples to focus on their relationship with Jesus.
- **Support and Healing:** Normalize seeking help through counseling and healing retreats, encouraging couples to share their experiences and address issues like addictions early in the preparation process.
- **Mentorship and Practical Experiences:** Implement mentorship-based preparation, including practical experiences like babysitting and finances.
- **Engaging Mentors, Leaders and Community:** Engage strong leaders, including deacons, in sacramental preparation, and create opportunities for experienced couples to mentor and support younger couples.

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- **Consistency and Standards:** Ensure consistency in marriage preparation across parishes to prevent couples from "shopping" for the easiest process, using standard benchmarks and a pastoral approach.

Part 4: Mystagogy (Married Couples)

Current Landscape

- Divorce rates are higher in the first 2 and 5-8 years of marriage, with the presence of children adding stress to family life. There is a lack of understanding and societal recognition about the traumatic effects of divorce.
- The demands of work and raising children often take precedence over couples' marriage and their relationship with God.
- Couples may lack trust in God and the Church regarding children (family planning and parenting).
- Many Catholics are cohabitating and/or civilly marrying; there is lack of understanding even among Catholics about marriage validation and sacraments.

Reasons for Concern

- The Church needs to activate more leaders and parishioners, especially strong joyful couples, to offer marriage ministries, retreats, small groups, formation programs, etc.
- Complicating marriage preparation and enrichment presents a risk of couples refusing this process or discouraging them from marrying in the Church.

Goal-setting with Graduality

- **Ongoing Support and Follow-up:** Provide follow-up support after the wedding, including check-ins at 6 months and 1 year, and involve mentor couples in ongoing guidance.
- **Celebration and Engagement:** Celebrate marriage as a ministry, involve parents and children in shared ministries, and send personal invitations to married couples for enrichment events.
- **Mentorship and Retreats:** Develop a mentor program for engaged couples and offer annual marriage retreats or enrichment programs tailored to different life stages.
- **Consistency and Implementation:** Ensure continuity and consistency across parishes, and develop a plan to implement the catechumenal model for couples after the wedding.

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- **Communication and Training:** Create a communication plan to explain the catechumenal process and train mentors with the same formation.
- **Paid Staff and School Involvement:** Hire paid staff to direct couples, possibly at the deanery level, and involve Catholic schools to engage families into the parish.

Suggested Follow-ups

- Set clear expectations around marriage preparation, provide formation for couples at each stage of life, and develop follow-up plans for married couples.
- Connect all the leaders of the parishes-based marriage ministries to share their current programs, find out more and then look at what we can implement, discuss pros/cons of formats/structures being used, how to incorporate mentors
- Some recommended steps
 - Get the lay of the land of what is already covered in marriage prep
 - Find ways of training and forming others
 - Obtain ecclesial support from the local ordinary
 - Provide resources
 - Set realistic goals
 - Create ways to oversee the plan rollout
- Create a council of lay and clergy to develop a solid plan that includes celebration with the couples through reconciliation, praying together, create retreats
- Form teams that go out to deaneries and parishes, to share the zeal for the marriage catechumenate.
- Christ Cathedral Parish will pioneer this opportunity to be bold and get the program started as the model for evangelization in our Diocese of Orange.