

## 2011 Summer Newsletter Diocese of San Bernardino- Office of Catechetical Ministry

When a couple is dating, everything seems to be a fairy tale. When young and in love, most of us dream about the perfect partner. Now days, through media, young people are sold the idea of a prince or princess (Disney style) as the perfect soul mate. Most of us, at one time, believe this fairy tale. Many times, our expectations for and from those who we choose as partners can be unreal. But, with all our differences, there are ways to help relationships work. It is a matter of personal choice and decision. As we all know, marriages and families are essential for the good of the Church and society. Our diocesan Vision Statement states "'Because the family provides a foundational experience of God, parishes must make meaningful connections between the reality of family life and the message of the Gospel."

In 2007 Bishop Gerald R. Barnes gave the Office of Catechetical Ministry the responsibility for the immediate preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. In the effort to understand the reality of the diocese and the effectiveness of this formation, this office conducted an initial parish survey along with consulting church related documents, Canon Law and the National Marriage Initiative by the USCCB Bishops. Our findings resulted in a 5 year Marriage Initiative for the whole Diocese of San Bernardino that was launched on February 14 2010. The goal for this Marriage Initiative is to become a "Marriage-Building Church" by protecting and advocating for marriage and family life; by promoting a comprehensive approach to ongoing education for the vocation to the Sacrament of Marriage at all stages of life ( specifically in three areas: youth and young adults, engaged and cohabitating couples and married couples); to create a culture in which Christian marriage education is seen as an integral part of people's lives in becoming the domestic church.

In addition the Diocese of San Bernardino partnered with the California Healthy Marriages Coalition, a pioneering non-profit organization that works throughout California to improve the well- being of children by strengthening the relationship of parents through Marriage Education and Relationship Skills classes ([www.caromarriage.com](http://www.caromarriage.com)). This approach complements and supports the Marriage Initiative by providing specific skills and knowledge necessary for marital stability, strengthen marriages and reduce family breakdown. These communication skills workshops are being offered throughout the six vicariates of the diocese.

Another important component of the Marriage Initiative is the "Sponsor Couple" approach for the immediate preparation of the Sacrament of Marriage. This approach is a one to one couple format which provides a higher level of intimacy and flexibility that is impossible in traditional large group. In this setting, Sponsor Couples can focus on the particular needs and issues of each engaged and/or cohabitating couple looking for the sacrament of Marriage. By using "sponsor couples" the key theological, psychological, catechetical/evangelical elements and content can be deal with more effectively. Sponsor couples can be matched with engaged/ cohabitating couple according to their age and experience. In addition, Sponsor Couples consistently claim that the process of sponsoring benefits their own marriage as well. The Sponsor Couples approach will be strongly recommended to all parishes in the diocese as the norm for the immediate preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. This is proven to be an effective and adaptable way to accompany engaged and cohabitating couples seeking the sacrament of marriage; as well as to those couples seeking convalidation.