

# WORKSHOP: NARME 2011 & NACFLM 2011

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Participants will be able to:

- 1 – Identify the key elements of an effective marriage preparation program.
- 2 - Propose a plan for recruiting and training mentor couples.
- 3 - Propose a plan for sustaining this kind of marriage preparation program.

## ***FOR BETTER AND FOR EVER: MENTOR TRAINING***

How to recruit and train couples to “mentor/sponsor” engaged couples.

### PART ONE

- Explanation of the five (5) editions of *For Better and For Ever*.
- The Table of Contents (on page 3 of *For Better and For Ever*)

### PART TWO

- Key Elements of the *For Better and For Ever* Program.

### PART THREE

- How to teach the content of *For Better and For Ever*?...What Sponsors/Mentor do.

### PART FOUR

- Setting up the Program in your church. [Adapt to your Organization.]

### PART FIVE

- How to Recruit Sponsor/Mentor Couples

### PART SIX

- Training Sponsor Couples.

### PART SEVEN

- Questions?????

**PART ONE** – Explanation of the five (5) editions of *For Better and For Ever*.

- Four (4) faith –based editions: 1 – Catholic - English  
2 – Catholic – Spanish  
3 – Catholic - Vietnamese  
4 – Christian (Protestant) - English

One (1) secular edition: Covenant edition - English.

Language and concepts are in accord with the Christian Faith in the Catholic & Christian editions; the Covenant edition uses only secular terminology.

- The **Catholic edition** deals with some specific **Roman Catholic** teaching that Catholics and their partners need to deal with (e.g. “freedom to marry” is more restrictive) but this edition does not assume that both persons (of the couple) are members of the Catholic Church. Likewise the Christian edition does not assume that both persons are members of the Christian tradition.
- The **Catholic and the Christian** (Protestant) editions both help couples address interfaith<sup>1</sup> & interchurch issues.
- The **Covenant (Secular)** edition makes no assumption that either person is a member of the Christian tradition. Those using the Covenant edition who wish to investigate religion, spirituality and interfaith/interchurch issues can find this material on the web site at [http://marriagepreparation.com/Spirituality\\_in\\_marriage.htm](http://marriagepreparation.com/Spirituality_in_marriage.htm)

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<sup>1</sup> **Interfaith** (they are of different Faith traditions, such as, Christian & Jewish). **Interchurch** (they are both Christian, but different denominations, such as, Catholic & Baptist).

The Table of Contents (on page 3 of *For Better and For Ever*)

Catholic & Protestant editions	Covenant (Secular) edition
Chapter 1 – A checklist of things to do....	Chapter 1 – A checklist of things to do....
2,3,4,5 Family Of Origin	2,3,4,5 Family Of Origin
6 – Living together	6 – Living together
8 – Money, Career, Cost of kids.	7 – Money, Career, Cost of kids.
9 & 10 Communication, problem solving, Dialogue.	8 & 9 Communication, problem solving, Dialogue.
7,11,12,14 – Lifelong commitment (no divorce), Intimacy (priority of love of spouse), spouse as equal, God as 3 <sup>rd</sup> party, Couple prayer.	10 – Covenant marriage (Content of Catholic edition chapters 7,11,12,15 in secular language. ) <i>Engaged couples who want to deal with Prayer &amp; Spirituality &gt; see web site <a href="http://www.marriagepreparation.com">www.marriagepreparation.com</a></i>
13 – Mixed Religion marriage.	<i>Engaged couples who want to deal with Mixed Religion &gt; see web site <a href="http://www.marriagepreparation.com">www.marriagepreparation.com</a></i>
15 – Family Planning	
16 – Decisions of Conscience	
17 – Stepfamilies	11 – Stepfamilies
18 - Parenting	12 - Parenting
19 – Belonging to a Church	13 – Sustaining our marriage (includes content Decisions of Conscience).
<i>Questions for 3 &amp; 6 month check up included in chapters.</i>	Questions for 3 & 6 month check up.
20 – Premarital covenant	Appendix A-Premarital Covenant
21 – Planning the wedding.	
Appendix A-Resources	Appendix B-Resources
Appendix B – Ideas for Mentors & Prayers	Appendix C – Ideas for Mentors
Appendix C – Strategy for Resolving Problems	Appendix D – Strategy for Resolving Problems
Appendix D – Validation of civil marriage (Catholic ed only)	
Appendix D/E – Support Plan	<i>See Chapter 13</i>

Most of the faith-based content in the Catholic and Protestant edition was re-written ~ in secular language ~ for Chapters 10 & 13 of the Covenant edition. The faith/spirituality & mixed religion content that was removed from the Covenant edition was placed on the web site > [http://marriagepreparation.com/Spirituality\\_in\\_marriage.htm](http://marriagepreparation.com/Spirituality_in_marriage.htm) and is available to any couple who wishes to study & dialogue about that content.

**PART TWO** – 3 Key Elements of the *For Better and For Ever* Program. *[It is possible to use For Better and For Ever without using all of these elements ~ for example, some couples use the workbooks without the benefit of a mentor couple ~ but attention to all of these elements provide the most benefit for engaged couples.]*

## 1 – THE PROCESS

The **Sponsor/Mentor Couple** - meets with **just one engaged couple at a time**. There are three elements to this method that provide a unique benefit to the engaged couple.

- 1) The Sponsor/Mentor couple is a real example of lifelong marriage and they are “ordinary people” (“real people”). They are most effective when the engaged couple sees them as “having issues, like us, but they have learned how to work at their issues” and “we can benefit from sharing with them”. **They are “witnesses” rather than “experts.”**
- 2) **The intimacy level** of the sharing between the sponsor/mentor couple and the engaged usually becomes highly intimate/vulnerable...the sponsor/mentor couple can “coach” the engaged couple through sharing and dialogue that is not possible or even appropriate to large group settings. By the end of the series of meetings, many/most engaged couples will say they learned to share things they “never” talked about with their partner or anyone else.
- 3) **The follow-up efforts** of the sponsor/mentor couple beyond the wedding are especially important because almost every couple will have important issues to deal with during the first year(s) of their marriage. **Stepfamilies especially!** The sponsor/mentor couple already has a relationship with the newly married couple and may be the best support to the newly married couple because they know the importance of being “for the two of you” rather than “taking sides” with one spouse against the other.

## 2 – THE CONTENT

The **CONTENT & SKILLS** couples need to learn and the skills for putting this information into practice **before** and **beyond** the wedding ceremony.

The Text and Questions of *For Better and For Ever* are the product of an educational/formational strategy for assisting adults to learn and practice counter/cultural skills....such as:

- Learning to deal with **Family of Origin** issues which ~ when not addressed effectively by the couple ~ become the most common reasons for the failure of marriage. *This may be the single most important content of For Better and For Ever and Keeping the Love You Find (Harville Hendrix) is a most user friendly resource for learning more about this topic. [Note: Hendrix continues to develop newer materials.]*
- **Money Matters** and Career Planning and Planning for Children.
- Lifelong Commitment to an **intimate relationship** vs. divorce as an on-going option.
- Communications skills: especially **dialogue**, intimacy building & problem solving skills.
- ACCEPTANCE OF THE OTHER AS **EQUAL IN DIGNITY (but not the same!)**

- **PRAYER**...a relationship & intimacy tool. (This is part of the text in the Catholic/Christian editions; the content on Prayer and Religious practice in marriage is available on the web site for couples using the Covenant edition.)

**These are skills that are typically not sufficiently present in each person's family of origin.** *For Better and For Ever* is designed to help individuals/couples learning skills for "self change" (rather than trying to change one's partner) so as to become a more effective partner in marriage.

Unlike educational projects in which adults seek to learn what they *admit they do not know*, the challenge of marriage preparation deals with couples who have developed relationship tactics<sup>2</sup> in their Family Of Origin ~ which will remain their default skills ~ which will need to be *changed* (such as, "secrets", manipulation, passive aggressive behavior, using power over, mind reading, making assumptions, etc....) if they are to be successful in establishing and sustaining an intimate and life giving marital relationship.

**Dialogue.** It has already been mentioned, but so important that it is listed as a separate element. *It could be said that this is the single most important skill for establishing and sustaining a successful marriage and that Keeping the Love You Find (Harville Hendrix) and his web site at > <http://gettingtheloveyouwant.com/free-resources> are two of the best resources for learning more about this skill.*

### **3 – THE FOLLOW-UP...BEYOND THE WEDDING.**

**Follow-up to marriage preparation.** I think that most everyone agrees that couples do not have marriage problems until after they are married. Historically we have tried to do "marriage preparation" before the wedding ceremony with the assumption that they would not need our assistance after they are married. We know today that "follow-up" is essential if we are going to provide quality marriage preparation. The sponsor/mentor couple has a relationship that can and must reach out to the newly married.

How to do this needs to be highly flexible.....phone and email and texting are likely best.

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<sup>2</sup> "tactics" or *ways of doing things* that may be counter-productive to achieving and sustaining healthy/intimate relationship.

## **PART THREE: TRAINING – How to teach *For Better and For Ever?*...What Sponsors/Mentor do.**

[Remember this is a “teach out of the box” program....self training is possible!]

### **STEP ONE - Getting Ready:.....do your homework!**

- 1 – Study DVD for an overview of what sponsors/mentors do & how to set up the program.
- 2 – Go through the text (workbook)...read text (use highlighter), answer all the questions in writing, **dialogue with one’s spouse** (highlight key questions). **[Learning to DIALOGUE with your spouse ~ and actually doing it ~ is essential because this is the #1 SKILL to teach!]**
- 3 – Study the document Key Concepts (See Resources web page).
- 4 – Contact local support folks or Ruhnke with any questions (See Contact Us web page).

### **STEP TWO** - When you are assigned a couple to sponsor/mentor:

5 – Call the engaged couple. Make sure they have their books and that they understand they will be coming to your home for a series of 5-7 meetings [depends on which edition is used]. Usually meetings are 2 weeks apart to give plenty of time for the homework. Make it clear which chapters they are to do homework on (explain importance of homework – “we are going to share what each of us learn doing the homework.”) and set the date of first meeting.

6 – Good idea to call the couple a few days before the first meeting to make sure everyone is on the “same page” for the date of the meeting, and the starting time and ending time (so they know the time frame).....remind them the importance of having their homework done.

### **STEP THREE** - When you begin the first session.....remember the following:

- Plan for where to meet in your home so as to minimize distractions (turn off TV and cell phones) - dealing with children – snacks –
- The First session....getting to know one another...some sponsors/mentors plan a first meeting just for this (but it is not necessary to do it that way).
- The FOUR RULES.
  - We are not the model couple...we want you to be you...
  - The right to pass...
  - What is said here, stays here... [Remember you are not professionals & not responsible for the engaged couple or their marriage. Do NOT send to sponsors/mentors couples who need professional assistance. If engaged need professional help, refer them back to pastor.]
  - We do not make a recommendation about you to the pastor.
- If you are using the Catholic or Protestant edition, remember to **Pray with the couple**...this is a key experience and topic....goal is to help them learn to pray together on their own.

- CLARIFY ROLE of sponsor/mentor (FB&FE: Appendix: Ideas for sponsor/mentor couples:
  - **Willing to share (vs. “teach”).** Share how I learned the hard way. NOT by lectures and NOT by claiming to be the model couple, but by sharing your own experience.
  - Able to **listen to engaged without needing to “fix.”** Listening to engaged is method of teaching listening skills to the engaged couple.
  - **Acceptance (vs. judgmentalism) does not mean agreement.**
  - Coach engaged toward a realistic understanding of lifelong (Christian) marriage and the **skills they will need for continuing to work at the project of lifelong (Christian) marriage.**
- [No Lecture] The Chapters of *For Better and For Ever* provide the “lecture” and the Questions after each Chapter which the engaged couples answer in writing and share in dialogue with one another help focus the content for each unique couple. The sponsor couple encourages the engaged couple to share what they have “learned” from their couple sharing. The sponsor couple shares their own answers to the questions as a method of “pump priming” (if the engaged couple seems hesitant to share) and as a way to teach how to share. **[This “no lecture” policy also means they don’t create content<sup>3</sup>]**
- The Sponsor couple *listens to the point of understanding* and thereby teaches listening skills.
- Also the Sponsor couple teaches acceptance by means of *listening to the point of understanding*.
- [Flexible] The sponsor couple is responsible for setting up the sessions and moving through the sessions so that all the chapters can be covered in 5-7 sessions....or change the process so that the material can be dealt with in fewer meetings if necessary.
- Dealing with questions. (not necessary to know all the answers, you can contact another couple after the session is over and have an answer for the engaged couple next time you meet)
- Additional Resources....see the book and web site at [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com).
- In addition to the 5-7 sessions.....Sunday breakfast, inviting them to church activities, etc.
- The sponsor couple is also responsible for follow-up....after the wedding....during the first year of marriage.

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<sup>3</sup> One of the values of *For Better and For Ever* is that it provides ALL the content needed. This means that sponsor couples do not have to design content and the pastor can be confident that the engaged couple is being taught appropriate/correct content.

## What kind of couples can do this???

“ORDINARY COUPLES.” .....that is....

- Couples committed to keep working at their marriage through the good times and bad times of life...and believe their marriage is a value to treasure. [not professionals!]
- Healthy ability to refrain from being judgmental. Able to deal with all kinds of people (vs. judgmental people)...engaged are likely to be “living together,” previous marriage, mixed religion.
- Willing and able to respect the content and process of *For Better and For Ever*....that is, READ chapter, WRITE answers in the book as homework, SHARE/DIALOGUE with partner.
- Highlight text and questions for sharing with engaged couple....learn to use “open-ended questions” and “simple listening” (vs. teaching).

**PART FOUR:** Setting up the Program in your church. [Adapt to your Organization.]

**1) POLICIES.** Some of these may be new to your church

- **New Structure** for dealing with couples. See pages 6&7 of *For Better and For Ever*.  
*Engaged Couples start with books.*  
*Meet with Pastor.*  
*Meet with Sponsor/Mentor Couple.*  
*Back to pastor.*  
*Wedding*  
*Follow-up.....by sponsor/mentor couple.*
- All couples must meet with pastor (or someone assigned this responsibility) before they can reserve the church for a wedding so the pastor can determine “freedom to marry” and help them choose an appropriate marriage preparation program.
- **While meeting with a sponsor couple is the preferred option, the church makes no promise that a sponsor couple will be available for every engaged couple.** This is a critical policy which helps support the quality of the program (sponsor/mentor couples must never be overworked).
- The pastor/church staff will have at least one other “back up” program for when no sponsor couple is available or for an engaged couple who cannot meet with a sponsor/mentor couple.

2) Pulpit Announcements. Invaluable for informing the congregation. The dating/engaged might not be present, but perhaps parents or grandparents will get this information and pass it on to the dating/engaged.

3) Bulletin announcements. Same as above....but also:

- Inclusion of web address “marriagepreparation.com” as a permanent feature in the bulletin (along with other web addresses you want to recommend).
- Look at the standard information already in the bulletin about sacraments. It may currently read something like: “*Sacrament of Matrimony: Contact us 6 months in advance.*” That is simply unrealistic and out of date because it does not provide adequate time for quality marriage preparation. Replace this information with: “*Sacrament of Matrimony: Contact us for a packet of information BEFORE getting engaged.*” [The packet of information can/should include *For Better and For Ever.*]

4) Informational Sessions. Important to provide forum for adult education/formation, where people can ask questions and fuller information than can be done from pulpit....and can be repeated periodically without “boring” the whole congregation. For example: *Wednesday evening there will be an Information Session about “What couples need to know about getting married in our church.” Everyone is welcome.* The use of *For Better and For Ever* ~ even for dating couples ~ can be explained at this kind of meeting.

## **PART FIVE:** How to Recruit Sponsor/Mentor Couples

This information is on DVD (Part2) and the written script in Resources on web site <http://www.marriagepreparation.com/NarratorTextVideo2.htm#Back%20to%20top>

1) Get the program going with 2 or 3 couples who can be easily trained (& do a lot of self-training). Thus formal recruiting and training is usually done only *after the program is already functioning* and those recruited will be able to see & talk with experienced couples.

2) Active support of the pastor is essential or folks will assume this is not important enough to get involved personally.

3) Policies. (See previous page) These must be put in place BEFORE making an effort to recruit / train sponsor couples....this is a way for the pastor to take an active/positive role in promoting the use of sponsor couples. Announcements from the pulpit, information in the bulletin, Information sessions taking place.....these are important signals about real change (in marriage preparation) and real leadership (investment of pastor and staff in various marriage preparation projects.)

4) Plan for Recruiting.....see Plan for Recruiting on the web site. >

[http://www.marriagepreparation.com/A\\_Plan\\_for\\_recruiting.htm](http://www.marriagepreparation.com/A_Plan_for_recruiting.htm)

- Decide how many you need (1 sponsor/mentor couple for every 2 engaged couples) (e.g. 10 sponsor/mentor couples for 20 engaged couples getting married each year in the church).
- Recruiting goal is 20 couples. This builds in 50% fall out from recruiting efforts to actual trained couples...and if all say “yes” and get trained you have luxury of them sponsoring *one per year which is the goal for the future.*
- Pulpit/bulletin announcements (some might respond to this...)
- Efforts of Pastor / staff / other parish leaders...to draw up list of people to personally recruit...group effort is helpful in screening.
- Staff and other parish leaders may know couples unknown to the pastor!
- Think of couples who are not involved in church activities, but might have a good marriage...this might be the ministry they can do (because done in their homes).
- Remember to look for interfaith<sup>4</sup> and interchurch couples.
- Typical to think of couples married 10+ years...but think about couples married less than 5 years (because they may be the people who will benefit most from the experience of sponsorship).
- Keep lists of responses....active (trained) couples, those who are not yet trained, those who declined temp, declined permanently...for the future efforts at recruiting.

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<sup>4</sup> *Interfaith* (they are of different Faith traditions, such as, Christian & Jewish). *Interchurch* (they are both Christian, but different denominations, such as, Catholic & Baptist).

## **PART SIX: Training Sponsor Couples and then supporting them..**

We have already gone over this.....see Part Three. (back to page 6 of these note.)

Supporting/sustaining Sponsor/Mentor couples and the program. Since 1975 the success of For Better and For Ever has proven the value of the program and the fact that it is a “low maintenance” program. Once couples become sponsor/mentor couples they tend to stick with the program. But this is also a “weakness” of the program because too often the program works so well that the pastor and staff neglect to do the following:

1. Continuing education/formation of the sponsor/mentor couples. Every sponsor/mentor couple should be expected to take part in continuing education/formation provided by the local church staff or the diocese. Catholic parishes and dioceses should expect their sponsor couples to become “certified” by the diocese. While there can be lots of flexibility about this process, the fact that couples are expected to take part in on-going education/formation is one of the most effective way to “support” these couples and the program. [Nothing wrong with gathering couples for dinner & fun, but these couples deserve being challenged to learn more and better skills they can pass on to the engaged couples.]
2. Continue to recruit and training new sponsor couples. If the church does not have very many weddings each year, there is a tendency to neglect adding to the pool of sponsor/mentor couples and this ~ ultimately ~ is a poor strategy because it “denies” to other couples the opportunity to benefit from this ministry. Every sponsor/mentor couple says “We love this ministry because we benefit even more than the engaged couples! Sponsoring has been the best thing we do for our own marriage enrichment.” In addition, adding new ~ and younger ~ couples is the best way to continue to make the program even more effective. And this makes the follow-up process much more “do-able” .....each sponsor couple has fewer couples to keep track of. “Older” sponsor couples can become more specialized, for example, they could set up the “Third Option” [ <http://www.thethirdoption.com/> ] in the parish.

How to get more assistance with all of this???

- Bring in Ruhnke or others on Resources Team.
- Some couples are able to use FB&FE, training videos, downloads to self-train.
- Get assistance from others in your area.....  
[www.marriagepreparation.com/local\\_support\\_couples.htm](http://www.marriagepreparation.com/local_support_couples.htm)

## **PART SEVEN: Questions?????**