

# PRE-CANA SESSION SAMPLE

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

## Preparing for Session 1

1. Set calendar dates for your program. 8-10 hours of instruction are expected, in 3 or 4 sessions, depending on the host parish's needs and availability.
2. Receive Marriage Prep Materials packets from Division of Evangelization and Catechesis, 410-547-5406. [cmahaley@archbalt.org](mailto:cmahaley@archbalt.org). Secretary.
3. For program assistance, Lauri Przybysz, Coordinator, Marriage and Family Life, 410-547-5420, [lprzybysz@archbalt.org](mailto:lprzybysz@archbalt.org)
4. Your resources:
  - a. Perspectives on Marriage Leader Guide (blue)
  - b. Leaders' Toolbox online at <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/index.cfm>
  - c. Catholic website, [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org)

## Session 1

### Christian Marriage / Communication

5. Team couples, introduce yourselves.
  - a. Put the engaged couples at ease
  - b. Use first names
6. Open all sessions with prayer. See Leaders' Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/prayer/index.cfm> Draw the couple into active participation.
7. Welcome & affirmation
  - a. Interested in their marriage not their wedding
  - b. Explain you are not professionals
  - c. Goal to make the couple feel comfortable
  - d. Ask what made them select sponsor couple
  - e. Ask about their expectations
8. Leaders, share your story Leaders' Toolbox <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/ministry/share.cfm>

- a. How long you've been married
  - b. How you met
  - c. Number of children
  - d. Why you are a Pre-Cana Team Couple
9. Icebreaker
- a. Ask the couples to introduce themselves to the group.
    - a. When and where their wedding will be
    - b. One admirable quality of one's partner
  - b. Other icebreaker of your choice
10. Presentation: Define & discuss "Love" – 1 Cor 13:4-7. *Leader's Toolbox*  
<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/commitment/vocation-love.cfm>
- a. Ask the couple what they think love is
  - b. Read 1 Cor 13:4-7
  - c. Re-read with "I" in place of the word "love"
  - d. Love is a decision not an emotion
  - e. Christian principles for a marital relationship: love, respect, mercy, trust
  - f. Marriage as a symbol of Christ's redemptive love for the Church
  - g. Three kinds of love
    - Philos – brotherly or friendship love
    - Agape – altruistic – willing to give life
    - Eros – sexual love
  - h. Role of husband and wife: mutuality ("Seek to outdo the other in kindness."  
 Philippians 2)  
 A husband should love his wife as Christ loved the Church and gave  
 His life for it  
 A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord
  - i. Three basic commands of God for marriage
    - Leave
    - Cleave
    - Be one flesh
11. Define Christian Marriage – we want this for you. We will explore this in the course of the meetings.
- Life-long
  - Faithful/exclusive
  - Open to children
  - a. Purpose of marriage preparation
    - Help the couple in their life long committed relationship with God and one another
    - An opportunity for prayerful reflection
    - Time to discuss important issues and learn more about each other
  - b. Marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the church, which is not a temporary or "trial" union, but one which is eternally faithful. – Pope John Paul II

12. Commitment

- a. Contract vs. Covenant Marriage
  - Contracts:
    - Deals with things
    - Engages the services of people
    - Can be broken with loss to contracting party
    - Can be coerced
- b. Covenant
  - Deals with people
  - Engages persons
  - Guaranteed by God
  - Cannot be broken
  - Requires free consent

12. FOUNDATIONS newsletter subscriptions (included in Archdiocesan Pre-Cana fee). Have couples fill out address cards to receive this quarterly follow-up publication after their wedding. Collect subscription cards and send to Marriage and Family Life.

## BREAK

13. NOTE: If the couples will take the FACET inventory during the First Session, the following presentation may be compressed to allow time for this activity-or time can be added to this session. The FACET takes about 30 minutes to complete. PRESENTATION:

Communication – See Toolbox for Marriage Prep Leaders,

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/communication/index.cfm>

- a. Different doesn't mean wrong- it only means different.
- b. The differences are not insurmountable, but must be met head on.
- c. Give focused attention.
- d. Use reflective listening.
- e. Identify content.
- f. Respond with empathy.
- c. Technique for active listening
  - One person talks – one person listens.
  - Listener repeats issues, ideas, and feelings.
  - Reverse the process.
- d. Levels of Communication
  - Personal sharing – sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings
  - Discussion – sharing ideas
  - Arguing – healthiest method of dealing with differences
    - Brings a new understanding
    - Helps a relationship grow
    - Indifference is the real enemy of love.
  - Fighting – harmful because there must be a winner and a loser
    - Abuse may be psychological, emotional, and physical.
    - Calling of names
    - Leaves scars
- g. Listen, clarify, and respond
- h. Share your feelings by first owning them.
- i. KISS – keep it short and simple.
- j. Positive & negative communication

Complaint  
Criticism  
Contempt  
Withdrawal

14. **Introduce the Pre-Marriage Discussion Inventory** -- it is not a test but an “tool for discussion”. Your program is using either FOCCUS or FACET inventory.
  - a. Excellent tool to help stimulate discussion
  - b. Important to answer for themselves, NOT what they think their future spouse would want them to answer. Work separately, then discuss after submitting responses. Results will be emailed to Sponsor Couple for discussion.
  - c. FOCCUS: Use yellow application form in the packet to apply for a FOCCUS session to be set up for this couple. Each session is pre-paid (with packet) and unique to the couple.
  - d. FACET: Remove answer sheets from yellow Perspectives Workbook, pp. 90 and 92. Each person responds to the FACET statements provided on pp. 93-100. Extra copy of the Statements is provided with your materials so that couples can work separately.
    - a. FACET also has two copies of a “Narrative Section” pp. 101-115, which couples complete and discuss later. The Narrative Section is not collected, but the questions could be used in a group setting.
  - e. FOCCUS: Instruct couple to mark the application form with the name and contact information of the priest/deacon who is meeting with them.
  - f. FACET: Instruct couple to write the name and contact information on the FACET Cover sheet, p. 120.
  - g. For couples getting married out of the diocese, instruct them to have the FOCCUS or FACET results sent to the priest/deacon who is “doing their paperwork”, the person who will meet with them to talk before their wedding.
15. FACET: Allow 30 minutes for the couples to take the FACET. Collect the Answer Sheets, extra copies of the Statement booklet, and the Cover Sheets for each couple.
16. FOCCUS is taken by the couple at home after the first session. Inform couples to allow a few days for the FOCCUS session to be set up and log-in information sent to the designated person(s).
  - a. Mail or fax the FOCCUS applications OR Two Completed FACET Answer Sheets with FACET Cover sheet to Marriage and Family Life 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21146, phone: 410-547-5406, Fax: 410-347-7896, [cmahaleyW@archbalt.org](mailto:cmahaleyW@archbalt.org)
  - b. Reiterate that it is important that the couples complete their FOCCUS promptly.
17. After the couple completes the FOCCUS or FACET, the designated facilitator will receive the results comparing their responses.
18. Upcoming sessions. Review the schedule.
19. Closing Prayer: A scripture reading and short blessing/thanksgiving prayer is appropriate.

# After Session One

Send FOCCUS Applications and FOUNDATIONS Subscription cards to:  
Marriage and Family Life, 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21146  
phone: 410-547-54106, Fax: 410-347-7896, [cmahaley@archabalt.org](mailto:cmahaley@archabalt.org)

## Session 2

# Expectations and Challenges of Married Life

*Perspectives Leaders' Guide* p. 55

Leaders' Toolbox online:

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/index.cfm>

1. Opening Prayer: Scripture reading or short prayer
  
3. Family of Origin – *Perspectives Leaders' Guide*, p. 32
  - a. Important to have sensitivity to situations of "absent" parent(s)
  - b. Major influence on my learning to be a spouse and what I expect in a spouse
  - e. I may be more like my same sex parent than I might like to believe.
  - f. Women
    - Are more comfortable in intimate relationships
    - Emotional manager
    - Approach rooted in how little girls play
  - g. Men
    - Are reluctant to dive head-first into emotional issues
    - Taught to suppress emotions
    - The game is more important than the interaction.
    - Told "Don't cry when you get hurt"
  - h. Expectations brought into marriage
    - Economic background
    - Family traditions
    - Upbringing
    - Ethnic background
    - Sexual differences
    - Personal strengths and weakness
  
5. Conflict Resolution
  - a. Handle differences as they occur.
  - b. How did your families resolve conflict? *WHERE WE COME FROM*, *Perspectives*, pp. 17 & 19.
  - c. Myth: "If you really loved me, you would have known."
  - d. Art of arguing
    - Keep calm.
    - Speak non-defensively.

Try validating spouse.

Attack the issue not the person.

How to resolve conflict satisfactory

The first one who realizes the argument has moved to a fight must stop the fight and re-establish "loving" communication.

-- "attitude check – I still love you."

6. Decision Process <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/good-decisions.cfm>

- a. Present the Christian decision making process as outlined in the Toolbox.
- b. We all have needs, partners should share theirs with each other
- c. Important not to confuse wants (nice to have) with needs (must have)
- d. Play NUDEL in Perspectives Workbook, pp. 59 & 62.
- e. Decisions are no longer "me" but rather "we"
- f. Both must input their ideas as to acceptability of options
- g. This is not only a right, but is a responsibility to the well being of the marriage
- h. What is best for us as a couple/family?" "
- i. SOLOMON # 9 and/or # 11 -- as appropriate

7. Finances – <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/financial-concerns.cfm>

- a. How do you identify with money?
- b. Does each understand the picture as to expected income and outgo?
- c. Basic understanding--all "our" money, "our" bills
- d. Important that budget allows each to have a set sum that they do not have to account for every penny
- e. Credit pitfalls---provide credit counseling service handout.
- f. Need for insurance for belongings when renting
- g. Need for wills to establish children's guardianship
- h. Need to understand the long-term money goals of each other
- i. Tithing, poverty issues, simplicity of lifestyle
- j. Other appropriate exercises:  
THE DOLLAR ALMIGHTY. Perspectives, p. 53  
YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE, Perspectives, p. 54

BREAK\

8. Explosive Issues

- a. Career opportunities--when each has his/her own career  
Set parameters regarding acceptable conditions for me to consider whether to give up my career or relocate to further yours.  
Career and children  
"Day care" vs. "Home care"? - Which parent stays home?
- b. Role expectations  
Who expects who to accomplish which tasks of the daily routine exercise? - TAKE THIS JOB, Perspectives, p. 45-47  
Chores are not gender-based any more.  
Women who are "stay at home" do 86% of household tasks.  
Women who work outside the home do 75% of household tasks.  
Share the tasks; don't divide (assign) them.  
Adjustments when children arrive

c. Role of in-laws

Exercise-- MY FAMILY, YOUR FAMILY, OUR FAMILY,  
Perspectives, pp. 18-20

Your marriage is to be the primary relationship.

The 'blood relative' should work through controversy with his/her family.

On the lighter side--what are you going to call your in-laws?

d. Domestic abuse

Since this is a growing problem area, review the information in the Online  
Toolbox, [http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-  
family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/violence.cfm](http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/violence.cfm)

If you have doubts, complete Perspectives exercise on your own and  
get help through appropriate agencies listed in couple packet.

For more information refer to Perspectives, p. 78

9. Homework Assignment Recommendations

a. FIGHTING FAIR – Perspectives, p. 9

b. FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING – Perspectives, p. 10

c. ON OUR WORST BEHAVIOR – Perspectives, p. 11-13

d. TRY, TRY AGAIN – Perspectives, p. 12-14

10. Q & A's

Ask couple if they have questions.

11. Closing Prayer

# Session 3

## Marital Intimacy and Spirituality

See *Perspectives Leader Guide*, pp. 54-55, 57

See Leader Toolbox Online

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/index.cfm>

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/index.cfm>

1. Opening Prayer
2. Explain the purpose of the session
  - a. Sex—who we are and marital intimacy
  - b. How each affects the other and the physical joy of our marriage
  - c. Learn about Natural Family Planning
  - d. Get resources for taking a NFP course later
  - e. Forming a Christian household connected to Parish
  - f. Scriptural basis for husbands and wives
  - g. Interchurch/Interfaith marriage
  - h. Parenting
3. Family, the school of love. See Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/family.cfm>
4. Theology of the Body/Sexuality Leaders' Toolbox <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/marriage-sexuality.cfm>
  - a. Married partners give the gift of themselves in sexual relations
  - b. Marital sex is also a spiritual communion.
  - c. One's sexuality is that part of my personality that is the way it is partly because of my gender (basic differences and environment)
  - d. Sharing of our experiences that highlight differences
  - e. Harvard study about 25,000 words for women/12,500 for men
  - f. Wife comes to husband with a problem --she does not want a solution. She wants to vent; he wants to try to fix.
  - g. "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus": Does this describe you?
  - h. Our gender identity (whether innate or learned) does have an effect on our approach to sex.
  - i. The door for sexual satisfaction for men basically physical-touch, sight, smell, etc.
  - j. For women basically emotional-tenderness, sensitivity, communication, romance
5. Sexual Relationship
  - a. Need to develop a comfortable way to communicate sexual needs to one another
  - b. SOLOMON # 12, Perspectives Workbook, p. 34
  - c. Not every sign of physical need may indicate a need to have intercourse
    - Sometimes all I need is a hug
    - Importance of sharing our sexual expectations of marriage
    - Sex and sexuality exercise from Perspectives, p. 65-67

This is for private discussion; not to be discussed with the group.

- d. Make an effort to create a 'comfortable atmosphere' as we show our love
  - e. Review SOLOMON #3
  - f. Past experiences
    - Avoid comparing spouse with past relationships.
    - Certain issues must be shared between the partners:
      - Children from past relationships
      - STD history
      - Negative experiences that might cause future problems
  - g. Remember the basic reason for physical experience is to show love
6. Intimacy
- a. Build intimacy on many levels
  - b. Exercise on INTIMACY CHECK UP, Perspectives, p. 26-28
  - c. Exercise on TOWARD INTIMACY, Perspectives, p.25-27
7. Family Planning
- a. Share video presentation or a live witness talk about NFP
  - b. Present what the church teachings are on the matter
  - c. Planning your family is not wrong according to the church
  - d. Only problem is when artificial means are employed
  - e. The church not only approves of, but also encourages, NFP
  - f. Provide the NFP resources in the couple packet with teacher contact information
  - g. Infertility
    - Infertile couples can be open to life in other ways:
      - adoption, working with children, foster parenting, etc.

BREAK

8. Church (Sacrament)
- a. Play SOLOMON # 1, Perspectives, p. 33
  - b. Sacramentality of marriage, Leader's Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/sacrament.cfm>
  - c. Outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace
  - d. The marriage 'grace' is what assures us of our love when we might not like him/her
  - e. Find ways for "living the sacrament" - Perspectives p. 79
  - f. An unspoken statement about belief in God and the need to live in a relationship based on what Scripture and Catholic tradition teach.
  - g. "Braid" analogy (man-woman-God: "A three-ply cord is not easily broken" Eccl. 4:12)
9. Faith Life of Your Family
- a. Connected to a faith community. Joining a parish.
    - i. Provide contact information for connections to parish life.
    - ii. Information for joining a parish elsewhere.
  - b. The Domestic Church – your home is a true expression of church
  - c. Building traditions through the seasons and holidays
  - d. Your family inspires others to love and service

10. Married Spirituality, Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/married-spirituality.cfm>
- What does my faith mean to me?
  - Learn to pray together regularly
  - Develop a joy of sharing and being with one another
  - Forgive one another
  - Take time to rest and reflect alone and renew your spirit
11. Interfaith Weddings/Families (if applicable), Leaders' Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/interfaith-weddings.cfm>  
Half of all marriages in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are interfaith
- Handle children' faith decisions very carefully
  - Build spiritual common ground while respecting differences
  - TWO FAITHS, ONE LOVE, Perspectives, p. 39
12. Sacred Signs, Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/sacred-signs.cfm>
- Importance of marriage vows
  - Do you both have the same understanding as to what the words mean?
  - Importance of strong spiritual life to a marriage
  - The family that prays together stays together. Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/commitment/stats-risk.cfm>  
 Approx. 1 in every 2 US marriages ends in divorce  
 1 in 50 marriages of couples married in a church ends in divorce  
 1 in 1105 marriages of couples, married in a church and who have a prayer life at home, end in divorce
  - Psalm 127:1: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”
13. Parenting <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/parenting-tips.cfm>
- Scripture makes it clear that our first responsibility as parents love our children. Discipline a part of love.
  - We are charged that they are brought up to love God, with an understanding of God expects from his people.
  - See Colossians 3:20-21—“You children, obey your parents in everything as this is the acceptable way in the Lord; and fathers, do not nag your children lest they lose heart.”
  - Basic parental guidelines:  
 Who is in charge?  
 Children interpret the existence of boundaries as "love".  
 However, they are always testing the boundaries.  
 Parents decide when the boundaries are moved (rules are changed).  
 With older children, it may be appropriate to include them in the discussion -- but the decision belongs to the parents.
  - Agreed upon disciplines must:  
 Be appropriate to the infraction  
 Not be the same for all children --each is individual person  
 Be 'realistic'--can be administered

Be administered with consistency and mercy

Be started as early as possible (set expectations early)

f. Parents are accountable to God for modeling moral life.

Children will follow example not words.

Children spell love "t-i-m-e".

14. Q & A's

15. Couples complete PROGRAM EVALUATION.

16. Closing Ceremony and prayer. Award CERTIFICATES