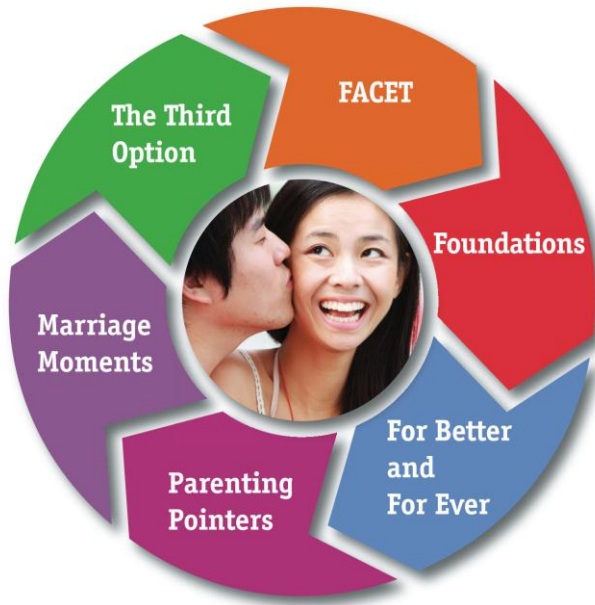


## 52 EASY WAYS TO SUPPORT MARRIAGE IN YOUR PARISH



The Catholic Church wants to support married couples and to strengthen marriages in the community, and yet most parishes struggle to provide an ongoing marriage ministry for their parishioners.

We want to offer you some suggestions to support the vocation of marriage in your parish that can be accomplished with very little expense and with just a few volunteers. We have worked in the field of marriage preparation and enrichment for many years and we believe that any parish can complete a few of the 52 suggestions with a little effort, and then gain the confidence to do more.

We would love to partner with you and offer our own experience, encouragement, advice, and resources. We each have had success in one of the four dimensions of marriage ministry (marriage preparation, newly married, ongoing enrichment, and support for troubled marriages) that make up a comprehensive ministry to marriage in the parish.

The overall goal is to have a consistent presence in the parish that supports couples in their Christian vocation of marriage.

Such a presence might include:

- A section in the weekly bulletin designated for marriage
- A web page on the parish website
- A consistent time and place for marriage enrichment (e.g. parish meeting room every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday)
- A list of professional marriage counselors who will support marriage
- A list of couples from the parish who would pray for other couples.

But wait, there's more. See the rest of the **52 Ways to Support Marriage in Your Parish**. Look over the list provided and choose a few that you would like to try in the coming months. You can visit our [website](http://www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com) for more details about the idea you have chosen. Once you have completed the project, just check it off the and perhaps choose another one to work on. We welcome your suggestions too. Be part of the ministry.

Provided by **Marriage Ministry Made Easy**. ([www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com](http://www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com))

## **MARRIAGE PREPARATION**

1. Put photos of couples preparing for marriage on a bulletin board at an appropriate place inside the church. Ask parishioners to keep these couples in prayer.
2. Include the name and the wedding date of each engaged couple in the Sunday *Prayer of the Faithful* about a month before their wedding. (They would be mentioned just one Sunday.)
3. At a Sunday Mass a *couple preparing for marriage and their sponsor couple* can attend together, the presider can ask the two couples to stand and be acknowledged during the parish Announcements at the end of Mass.
4. Get email addresses and wedding dates of couples preparing for marriage. Send them a weekly email from the pastor or marriage preparation team until they are married. It could be brief (keeping them in prayer) and offer a question (What new thing did you learn this week about your partner?) Once they are married, remove them from this list and pass the information to the newly married email list.
5. The parish school or CCD program creates a card or letter for each couple preparing for marriage. Each class would do this for just one couple (if there are lots of couples each year) or each class could do this for all the couples if there are only a few couples preparing for marriage each year.
6. Arrange for one or two of the couples preparing for marriage to visit with a class of teens (parish school or CCD) or adults (RCIA or Adult Ed) to share why they are looking forward to their wedding day. Even better if their sponsor couple(s) can come with them and they can talk about the value of “sponsoring” those preparing for marriage.
7. Schedule an Information Evening: *Everything you might want to know about getting married in the Catholic Church, but didn't know who to ask*: Wednesday 7:00 – 8:30 PM. Depending on the size of the parish, this might be offered every few months. The Pastor or someone competent to answer possible canon law questions about freedom to marry would need to lead this. Parish policies and marriage preparation programs can be explained.\*
8. Check to see what the parish bulletin says about the Sacrament of Matrimony. If it currently says something like Marriage: “*Contact us xx months in advance,*” recommend new text such as: “*Contact us for a packet of information about preparing for marriage and planning your wedding. Study this information even before you get engaged!*”
9. Consider a box in the parish bulletin for listing web sites. The box would include [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) (and the title will communicate what it is about!)
10. Schedule an evening workshop: *Relationship Skills for Singles and Dating Couples*. John Van Epps materials or DVD, followed by discussion. [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com)\*
11. Schedule an evening “*Discussing the Pro's and Con's of online dating services.*” \*
12. Contact the person(s) in charge of liturgy planning to see if they can accept the wisdom of “Whenever we pray for VOCATIONS, let's make sure that Matrimony is included as a church vocation (“a path of holiness and service”).
13. Check with parish catechetical leaders (School/CCD/RCIA/Adults) to make sure that catechesis about Matrimony as a vocation is incorporated in age appropriate ways into all catechetical and formation program for children, young adults and adults.\*

\* Further information, resources and planning details can be found at [www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com](http://www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com)

**NEWLY MARRIEDS**  
(the first 5 years of marriage)

14. Hold a reunion for all couples married in the parish over the last year. Have food (pizza, pot luck, etc.) and invite them to bring their wedding albums with them and share their pictures with their hosts and each other. After dinner ask each couple to share one memorable thing about their wedding day. After everyone has shared end with a simple prayer or blessing. See [foundationsnewsletter.net](http://foundationsnewsletter.net) for suggestions.\*
15. Collect the email addresses of all couples married over the last year and sign them up for Marriage Moments, a free weekly reflection on marriage. This is very easy but very important to do. It allows you to communicate with couples even if they move or don't come to church on a regular basis. We can't help couples or offer support if we can't find them.
16. Consider giving each new married couple a year's subscription to Foundations Newsletter as a wedding present from the parish. The cost is \$10 per year and it is mailed directly to the couple's home. A beautiful gift card is available to give each couple. The parish will receive a complimentary subscription so you will see exactly what the couples are receiving.\*
17. Invite newly married couples to be lectors, Eucharistic ministers, youth leaders, etc.
18. If the parish has a wedding anniversary celebration for couples married 25 , 50, 60, or more years ask newly married couples to act as hosts, greeters and with serving refreshments. They could also be asked to help organize the event, take pictures and post to the parish website.
19. Send each couple an anniversary card for their first year anniversary. If they have moved offer to connect them with a parish in their new location.
20. Assign a married couple to each newly married couple and ask them to pray for them, send them a letter of support or invite them over for dinner.\*
21. Invite newly married couples to start a marriage preparation program in your parish if you don't have one. If a program exists invite them to join the team.
22. Develop a program for newly married couples and then ask couples married five years or less to stay after Mass for five minutes. Tell them about the program and ask them to put their contact information on a sheet of paper if they think they might be interested. Then follow up with a call or email.\*
23. Have a social group for young marrieds. Only those married one to five years are eligible.
24. Sponsor an NFP information evening in the parish and personally invite newly married couples to it.\*
25. Make sure your Baptismal program has information on marital adjustment after the birth of the first child. Encourage couples to work on their relationship at this critical time. Research indicates that the birth of the first child is often a stressful time for the couple.\*
26. Hold a retreat day for all married couples and send a written personal invitation to the newly married couples in the parish. Go to [www.Foundationsnewsletter.net](http://www.Foundationsnewsletter.net) for a suggested format.\*

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## **MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT**

27. Put the free, weekly *Marriage Moments* and *Parenting Pointers* in you bulletin, newsletter, or on your parish website.\*
28. Publicize the [www.ForYourMarriage.org](http://www.ForYourMarriage.org) website everywhere.
29. Publicize other helpful marriage enrichment websites: [www.SusanVogt.net](http://www.SusanVogt.net), etc.
30. Mention the needs of married couples in the *Prayers of the Faithful*. For a list of 100 Family Related Petitions go to one of the following sites: At least one a month is about marriage.
  - By month: [100 Family Related Petitions](#) (Click on Leadership/Articles)
  - By theme: [www.NACFLM.org](http://www.NACFLM.org) (Scroll to bottom of home page.)
31. Promote date nights. The parish could simply promote the idea or it could sponsor a date night once a month/quarter/year. Couples start at the parish, hear a talk or go out on their date, and come back for a blessing. See [Couple's Scavenger Hunt](#)\* or [52 Weeks of Creative Dates](#)\* as a start. Other resources: *52 Dates for You & Your Mate*, *10 Great Dates for Empty Nesters* (Dave & Claudia Arp), [Six Dates for Catholic Couples](#) (program by John Bosio, \$75)
32. Use Facebook or Twitter to keep in touch with your married couples, give them tips, and alert them to upcoming events. (Perhaps a newly married couple would help you set it up.)
33. Educate couples on marriage friendly internet practices. Link to [Technology Tips & Traps for Couples](#)\* as a start. ([www.SusanVogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm](http://www.SusanVogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm))
34. Book Studies. These can be parish hosted or simply suggest interesting marriage books for couples to read themselves. Some may organize a home study group with a few friends. See <http://foryourmarriage.org/marriage-resources/news-blogs/book-of-the-month> for ideas.
35. Recommend marriage enhancing movies or host a movie night at the parish. (Suggestions: *The Story of Us*, *Fireproof*, *Another Year*...)
36. On World Marriage Day (Sunday preceding Valentine's Day), ask all couples married less than one year to stand, then all married, 1-5 years, 6-25, 26-49, 50+ years)
37. Encourage support groups of couples in similar marriage situations. The parish could sponsor these and provide a program. If you're pressed for time and money, however, simply suggest the idea to couples and offer resources that would help them self-lead a group.\*
38. Not all married couples have children, but for those who do, parenting issues are often a big stress. Offering literature or information about parenting resources can support your couples. Catholic Charities often offers parenting programs.
39. Of course it's always nice to host a speaker on marriage as a special event, but if time and resources don't permit, promote other marriage enrichment opportunities sponsored by Marriage Encounter, Better Marriages, your diocese, etc.

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## **TROUBLED MARRIAGES**

40. Add intercessions to the *Prayer of the Faithful* like, “For struggling married couples that they may find the help and support they need.”
41. Include links to websites in parish bulletins (and other literature) that can help couples in struggling marriages. (See [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org), [www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com), [www.divorcebusting.com](http://www.divorcebusting.com) for ideas.)
42. Prepare a local resource list for troubled couples and leave the lists near church entrances where they can easily be found.
43. Acknowledge during the homily that most married couples struggle at times (so couples will feel more comfortable seeking help early).
44. Slip a flyer into the marriage preparation folder saying, “Make Your Love Last Forever. Don’t let little problems become big problems. If you are struggling, here are places that can help.” Then list resources, including reputable counselors.
45. Use Marriage Enrichment as an opportunity to catch struggling couples by placing counselors, domestic violence information, and other resources in everyone’s packet.
46. Add books and pamphlets on marriage to the vestibule book rack or donate to the parish library.  
Suggested books: *Can My Marriage Be Saved?* by Mae & Erika Chambers; *Divorce Busting* by Michele Weiner Davis; *Fighting For Your Marriage* by Stanley, Markman, and Blumberg; *Love Must Be Tough* by James Dobson; *Reconcilable Differences* by James Talley; *Surviving an Affair* by Willard Harley; *Torn Asunder* by Dave Carder
47. Educate staff on how to sensitively and compassionately handle calls from distressed couples. Develop parish protocols for getting hurting couples to counselors quickly.
48. Download and distribute the free bookmark, “How to Help Hurting Married Couples” to help parishioners help each other. (See [www.TheThirdOption.com](http://www.TheThirdOption.com))
49. Subsidize marriage counseling by adding a part-time marriage counselor to the parish staff or giving couples vouchers they can take to a counselor’s office.
50. Offer “Marriage Care” – a parish first response for troubled couples (See [www.familylife.dpsrfd.org](http://www.familylife.dpsrfd.org). Click on Marriage Builders.)
51. Make sure information about support groups and weekend programs for hurting marriages (such as Third Option or Retrouvaille) are in the church bulletin.
52. If you don’t have The Third Option and/or Retrouvaille in your area, consider joining with other parishes to bring them.\*

\*Further information, resources and planning details can be found at [www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com](http://www.MarriageMinistryMadeEasy.com)