

Article

Support for Engaged Couples in Preparation for a Catholic Marriage

Urszula Dudziak 

Department of Family Sciences, Institute of Theology, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin,
20-950 Lublin, Poland; urszula.dudziak@kul.pl

Abstract: Marriage can be solemnised in a non-religious setting, through a declaration given before a civil servant. Alternatively, it may incorporate a religious dimension and take place in a church, with an accompanying prayer, the presence of a priest, and a blessing. Quoting from the Old and New Testaments, the author highlights the fundamental aspects of marriage within the Catholic Church. The author also explores the tasks and characteristics of marriage, comparing the declaration made at the Registry Office for secular marriages with the vows exchanged during a church wedding. The article also draws attention to the premarital counselling offered by the Catholic Church, provided by priests and family life counsellors. This counselling is a valuable and necessary resource for engaged couples as they prepare for marriage and parenthood. It can help couples with two important tasks: expressing love and transmitting life.

Keywords: God; love; marriage; Catholic religion; support for fiancés

1. Introduction

One of the greatest human accomplishments is to discern one's own vocation and select a path in life. This can take the form of entering the priesthood or a religious congregation, or pursuing solitude in order to better serve the many. However, the prevalent choice is to get married, start a family, and take care of one's own children (Dudziak 2022c, p. 119).

Both civil and ecclesiastical law provide regulations for the conduct of marriage. The civil law regulations are discussed using Poland as an example. They may be of interest to people in other countries who may wish to make comparisons and evaluate what is the same and what is different from the regulations in their own countries. Religious principles based on Scripture and Church documents apply to Catholics all over the world. Researchers of different faiths may identify similarities and differences between the teachings on marriage in the Catholic religion and the references to marriage in other religious denominations. The topic addressed is thus heuristic, indicating the need for further research to expand knowledge on the issue.

This article presents a comprehensive guide to preparing for marriage, drawing on documents from the Polish Episcopate, premarital course materials from various countries, and the author's experience conducting conferences for fiancés and meetings in a family life counselling centre. The aim is to encourage readers interested in this issue to explore the programmes for marriage preparation implemented in other countries and religious communities.

The purpose of this article is to outline the support available to engaged couples in preparation for Catholic marriage. It provides an explanation of the concept of marriage according to both secular law and the Catholic religion. The article also explores the wedding ceremony, spoken vows, moral obligations, and goals of marriage, as well as the role of the Church in preparing Catholic spouses to implement these in their lives. The efficacy of this preparation is assessed in the subsequent years of married and family life.



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2. Material and Methods

The article's content is drawn from legal and ecclesiastical documents, as well as from previous publications on marriage and family and author's own involvement in courses preparing fiancés for marriage. The study of the collected material was conducted by employing methods such as analysis and synthesis, as well as observation, introspection, deduction, and induction ([Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2001](#); [Oxford English Dictionary 2010](#)). These are valuable research methods useful both in assessing the effectiveness of premarital preparation courses and in reflecting on the audience's response to content related to love, procreation, and family life. The application of these methods proved successful in describing the pastoral support of spouses in speeches given by Pope John Paul II during His pilgrimages to Poland. Based on this, an earlier article was published in *Religions* in an issue dedicated to pilgrimages and religious mobilization in Europe ([Dudziak 2022b](#)). Drawing from this experience, it can be presumed that utilizing these methods will also be valuable in highlighting the role of religion in preparing for marriage and family life.

The documents analysed included: Acts from The Family and Guardianship Code ([Ustawa \[Act\] 1964](#)), Prawo o aktach stanu cywilnego The Law on Civil Status Records ([Prawo o aktach stanu cywilnego 2023](#)), The Documents of the [Vatican Council II](#) (1963, 1964, 1965), [Charter of the Rights of the Family](#) (1983), The Code of Canon Law ([Codex Iuris Canonici 1983](#)), [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (1993), John Paul II's exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* ([John Paul II 1981](#)) and Letter to Families ([John Paul II 1994](#)), The Instructions on Preparation for Marriage issued by The Polish Episcopal Conference in 1969, 1975, and 1989, and The Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family ([The Polish Episcopal Conference 2003](#)), as well as many others.

The observation of prenuptial couples attending a family life counselling centre as part of the mandatory premarital course, the conversations with them, lectures, and meetings dedicated to determining fertile and infertile days in the menstrual cycle, provided further insights for the analysis of the presented topic. Pre-marital course programmes from the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia also proved to be valuable in terms of both content and methodology.

Experience shows that premarital courses are not required before civil weddings. However, they are required and conducted in the Catholic Church. This constitutes a specific contribution of the religious community to the preparation for married and family life. The diversity of content and forms of premarital courses conducted by priests and lay family life counselors in various countries can facilitate the adoption of what is most useful for future spouses.

3. Results

As planned, the analysis of the documents permitted this section to present the concepts of the two types of marriage (i.e., Church marriage and civil marriage). It also allowed for the revealing of the foundations of marriage, its tasks, and the vows and commitments made.

These issues may be important, not only for engaged couples, but also for married couples and parents raising children. They may also be helpful for family life counsellors who offer professional support to engaged couples and families.

3.1. Marriage and Its Types

According to sociologists, "marriage is considered one of the oldest social institutions that founds the family and exists in all known societies, evolving alongside their historical development. The structure and nature of marriage are shaped by the culture, the legal and religious standards that regulate it, and the economic progress of a given society" ([Małżeństwo. \[Marriage\] 1997](#), p. 483).

In accordance with Polish law, Article 1, paragraph 1 of The Family and Guardianship Code specifies that "Marriage is contracted when a man and a woman both make a decla-

ration before the head of the Registry Office, stating that they are entering into marriage with one another” (Kodeks Rodzinny i Opiekuńczy [The Family and Guardianship Code]—hereinafter referred to as KRO), [Ustawa \[Act\] 1964](#), Article 1(1)). It is important for those about to enter into marriage to understand that “Spouses have equal rights and obligations in marriage. They have a responsibility to cohabit, aid each other, uphold fidelity, and collaborate for the betterment of the domestic unit established through their bond” ([Ustawa \[Act\] 1964](#), Article 23).

The Central Statistical Office of Poland, on the basis of The Family and Guardianship Code Act of 25 February 1964 (*Journal of Laws* 2017, item 682, as amended) and The Law on Civil Status Records Act of 28 November 2014 (*Journal of Laws* 2021, item 709, as amended), defines marriage as “a legal partnership between two individuals of the opposite gender, subject to certain mutual rights and obligations as established by customary practices and the law” ([Małżeństwo. \[Marriage\] 2023](#)). Concluded on 28 July 1993, the Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland (*Journal of Laws* 1998 No. 51, item 318) facilitates “the registration of marriages subject to the internal law of a church or religious association, which are conducted in the presence of a clergyman, in Civil Registry Offices. A marriage conducted in this manner is subject to Polish legislation and carries identical legal implications as a marriage conducted before the head of a Civil Registry Office” ([Małżeństwo. \[Marriage\] 2023](#)). Therefore, Catholics who desire a church wedding are no longer required to have both civil and church weddings, since the church ceremony is already recognized as legally binding.

Catholic marriage extends beyond a mere legal or social agreement. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which quotes the Code of Canon Law, marriage is “the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, [and] is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1601; *Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1055). Matrimony is a sacrament which is a perceptible sign of divine grace which helps to fulfil the conjugal vocation. It is granted by Christ through the mediation of the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1084). The words of the oath spoken by the couple and audible to those in attendance in the church. Additional prominent symbols include the binding of hands with a stole and the exchange of rings. The 48th paragraph of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the Second Vatican Council’s documents essential to the Catholic Church worldwide, defines marriage as “the intimate partnership of married life and love [that] has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws” (*Vatican Council II* 1965, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 48). “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” underscores that God is the Creator of marriage (*Vatican Council II* 1965, *Gaudium et Spes* 48). In numerous religions, marriage is considered as the relationship between a man and a woman who commit to building a long-lasting physical and spiritual partnership ([Małżeństwo. \[Marriage\] 1997](#), p. 483). The Code of Canon Law mandates priests and the congregation to offer informative support to the faithful to sustain their Christian faith and enhance the matrimonial union. This should be achieved through preaching; providing age-appropriate catechesis, broadcasts, and publications; preparing nuptial candidates for marriage, “a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church”, as well as offering help “to those who are married, so that [by] faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family” (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1063).

3.2. Marriage in the Catholic Religion

The foundation of marriage in the Catholic religion is to be found in the Bible ([Bible n.d.](#)) also called the Holy Scripture (*Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu* 1980)¹. Described in the first book of the Old Testament, the creation of man in the image and likeness of God and the submission of all that has been created to the dominion of man, shows the dignity of the human being as the culmination of the work of creation.

The likeness between man and his Creator leads to reflection on who the Creator is and in what respects man resembles God. Saint John offers an unequivocal response to the question “Who is God?” in his letter, being one of the books of the New Testament, stating that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). Since God, who is love, created humans in His own image and likeness, it means that at the moment of creation, humans were endowed with both the capacity and the vocation to love. The grandeur of humanity is evident in the way in which human love is realised in one’s own life. This applies to the love for God, for fellow human beings, and for the entire world, which man is expected to manage skilfully and responsibly. A duty incumbent upon all human beings is to love their neighbour unconditionally. Marital love concerns spouses and is even greater than love of one’s neighbour; it involves the spouses and their bodies, through which it is expressed. The complementary nature of man and woman enables them to correspondingly help each other. Their love bears life. The Book of recounts God’s blessing of the first human couple and their entrusted mission to transmit life:

“And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ (Genesis 1:28). Thus, the two primary tasks of married couples, which represent the ultimate aims of sexual intercourse, are the manifestation of conjugal love and the transmission of life.

The archetype of the communion that marriage ought to form is the communion of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. John Paul II noted in his *Letter to Families* that “the ‘communion’ of persons is drawn in a certain sense from the mystery of the Trinitarian ‘We’, and therefore ‘conjugal communion’ also refers to this mystery” (John Paul II 1994, p. 19). The spousal relationship between God and his people is reflected in the relationship between a husband and a wife, which foreshadows the new and everlasting Covenant (Vatican Council II 1965, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 22). This concept also pertains to the relationship between Christ and the Church. Marriage is a communion in which a man and a woman work towards a shared objective, undertake common actions, and “supplement and serve one another” (Gębka 2003, pp. 19–20). In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul teaches “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph 5:1–2a). The sacramental love of the spouses justifies their sexual intercourse. Husband and wife, when they give themselves to one another, become “co-subjects of love and not subjects of use” (Gębka 2003, p. 23). “In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2360). This unique matrimonial bond leads to the starting of a new family. Saint Paul calls it the Great Mystery to point to and draw on the example of the bond between Christ and the Church: “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:31–32).

Examining the Catholic Church’s teaching on marriage, sociologist Mikołaj Gębka draws attention to the plethora of terms used to describe it. Marriage is characterised as a vocation, sacrament, covenant, domestic church, communion of life and love (Gębka 2003, p. 15). The Catechism of the Catholic Church underlines that “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1603). The love shared between a husband and wife “becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1604). “The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1660). “The sacrament of marriage signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus

perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1661). "The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called 'the domestic church', a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1666). "The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2221). Like the priesthood, marriage is "directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1534).

The fundamental tenets, and at the same time, the moral obligations of marriage are marital fidelity, the indissolubility of marriage, and responsible parenthood. These principles are derived from Scripture, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, The Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes*, and Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*. " (Vatican Council II 1965; Paul VI 1968). Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous" (Heb 13:4); "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mat 19:6); "By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement 'until further notice'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1646). "Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them" (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 48); "Responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time" (Paul VI 1968, *Humanae vitae* 10).

Sexual intercourse is regarded as the ultimate expression of sacramental conjugal love. Therefore The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "Those who are engaged to marry are called to live chastity in continence. (...) They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2350); "The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2390); The married couple "give themselves definitively and totally to one another" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2364); "Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one's given word" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2365); Adultery, which is marital infidelity, is an injustice and a failure to honour commitments made and a violation of the welfare of children who need their parents' stable union (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, nos. 2380–2381).

A marriage solemnised in the Catholic Church is considered indissoluble. It is not within the power of any priest, bishop, episcopal court, or even the Pope to dissolve a validly contracted marriage. "From a valid marriage there arises between the spouses a bond which by its nature is perpetual and exclusive. Moreover, a special sacrament strengthens and, as it were, consecrates the spouses in a Christian marriage for the duties and dignity of their state" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1134). The Code of Canon Law stipulates that "A marriage that is ratum et consummatum can be dissolved by no human power and by no cause, except death" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1141). Due to the significant number of divorces being processed through civil courts, The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognises divorce as an undesirable practice and a societal plague. The spouses are cautioned that divorce causes grave harm to the deserted spouse and to children traumatized by the separation of their parents (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

1993, no. 2385). Civil remarriage by divorcees is described as public, permanent adultery (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2384).

The principles that are applicable to Catholic spouses also extend to responsible parenthood. According to Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*, family planning is moral and recommended, provided that fertility recognition, rather than fertility elimination methods, are employed (*Humanae vitae* 12 and 16). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2399) states that using contraceptives to prevent conception is morally impermissible. The ban on abortion is even more comprehensible, unequivocal, and unambiguous. The two books of Scripture, Exodus and Deuteronomy, outline God's Ten Commandments and refer to the fifth one as, "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). This is also specified by Pius XII, the Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, known as *Donum vitae*, as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the sentence "no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being" (Pius XII 1944; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1987; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 2258).

It is inherent in the marital vocation not only to give birth to a child but also to provide a child with physical, mental, and spiritual development through appropriate education. This represents a fundamental right and obligation of both parents. The Code of Canon Law outlines that "the physical, social, cultural, moral, and religious education" (*Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1135–1136) are the responsibility of the parents.

Through their mutual love and the pursuit of their chosen vocation, the spouses seek to perfect and sanctify one another during their time on earth and strive for eternal life in the house of God the Father in heaven (according to Jesus' declaration, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" John 14:2).

3.3. Marriage Vows in the Office and in the Church

Introduced in 1945, after World War II, and lasting until 1989, the socialist system in Poland unequivocally separated a civil marriage, concluded in the Registry Office (USC), from a church marriage. The words of the oath were also different. Marriage in the Registry Office is regulated by the Law on Civil Status Records (*Prawo o aktach stanu cywilnego* 2023), which is still in force today. The so-called civil marriage, which is a declaration of entering into marriage, is made by the bride and groom before the head of the Registry Office. The solemn form of this statement requires all present to adopt a standing posture, and the head of the Registry Office at the time of accepting declarations has a chain around his neck, featuring an eagle from the Polish coat of arms. It is also required that the declaration of marriage be made public, that is, in the presence of two adult witnesses. "A man and a woman are asked by the head of the Registry Office whether they intend to marry each other. When both parties confirm this, the head of the Registry Office requests them to submit declarations of marriage and declarations of the surnames of the spouses and their children" (Matela-Marszałek 2022). In accordance with Article 7(3) of The Family and Guardianship Code (*Ustawa [Act] 1964*), the head requests that each individual repeats after him or her, the contents of the declaration:

"Being aware of the rights and obligations arising from marriage, I solemnly declare that I am entering into matrimony with [first name and surname of the other person to the marriage], and I swear that I will do everything to ensure our marriage is harmonious, happy and lasting." (*Ustawa [Act] 1964*, article 7 (3))

A civil wedding ceremony includes a formal statement and declaration in which a man and a woman pledge to undertake action that will result in a long-lasting and happy union, based on mutual consent. However, the civil contract does not include a vow of love to each other. From a Catholic perspective, this contract cannot be considered an equivalent alternative to the sacrament of marriage (Dziewiecki 2023, p. 31). In his book for fiancés and spouses, the psychologist and theologian Marek Dziewiecki notes that "although civil marriage contracts are permitted by law, there are no criminal sanctions for breaking this

contract” (Dziewiecki 2023, p. 32). It is paradoxical that breaching a commercial contract can result in punishment, including imprisonment, while breaching a marriage contract, which can lead to the dissolution of the marriage and affect not only the betrayed spouse but also the children born of the relationship, is not penalised. Dziewiecki argues that “the state permits individuals who are at fault for a divorce to enter into subsequent civil marriages with others” (Dziewiecki 2023, p. 31).

The question then arises as to the differences between the vows made in the office and the vows made in the Church. According to the author of the book *Złączeni*, the sacrament of marriage “is not one of the citizens’ rights but a gift from God”. Entering into such a marriage is a privilege for God’s friends” (Dziewiecki 2023, p. 17). A church wedding and life in marriage hold significance for Catholics beyond their individual, communal, psychological, social, or institutional aspects. These two also hold religious, moral, and spiritual significance. The sacrament of marriage is a solemn celebration. As The Catechism of the Catholic Church states

“the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ (Cf. SC 61). In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself forever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up (Cf. LG 6). It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but ‘one body’ in Christ (Cor 10:17).” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1621)

Individuals who receive the sacrament of marriage should realise that the bond between husband and wife, initiated in the Church, is intended to mirror the loving, devoted, mutually respectful and reverential connection between Christ and the Church. The spousal relationship ought to mirror that of Christ to the Church and the Church to Christ.

Scripture and the Decalogue therein oblige every Christian to love God and neighbour. It is, as Jesus explained, the most important commandment (Mat 22:36–40). In accordance with St. Paul’s interpretation of the commandment of love, the entirety of the law is encapsulated in love (Rom 13:8–10). For spouses, the commandment of love takes on a new and deeper meaning (Jn 13:34–35).

In his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II stated that “the celebration of marriage-inserted into the liturgy, which is the summit of the Church’s action and the source of her sanctifying power (...) must be per se valid, worthy and fruitful” (John Paul II 1981, *Familiaris consortio* no. 67). Hence, before participating in the wedding Eucharist, individuals must first receive the sacrament of penance and reconciliation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1622). Having a pure heart and a living faith will allow for a deeper experience of prayer and a committed and authentic participation in building a lifelong relationship.

Marriage is a covenant made between a baptised man and woman that is free from coercion and impediments under natural or ecclesiastical law, as explained by *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1625, including considerations such as whether the man and woman are too young or already married to another living person. The essential element that establishes a marriage is the mutual consent of the bride and groom through the exchange of publicly spoken vows (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1626; *Codex Iuris Canonici* 1983, can. 1057). The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that “the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1631). “Several reasons converge to explain this requirement:

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- The public character of the consent protects the ‘I do’ once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it” (ibid.).

“Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is fitting that its celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993, no. 1663).

The exchange of vows marks the moment of marriage. This takes place after the congregation has listened to selected Scripture readings and a sermon from the celebrant during the Mass.

The celebrant addresses the bride and groom by their names, saying: “[the name of the groom] and [the name of the bride], you have just heard the word of God which has reminded you of the dignity of human love and marriage. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions”. After that, he asks then three questions:

- “[the name of the groom] and [the name of the bride], have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?
- Do you intend to stay in this bond in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, until death parts you?
- Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” (*The Rite of the Marriage* 2013).

A positive response to all three questions above entitles the prospective spouses to take the oath. This is a particularly significant moment in the sacrament of marriage, as the decision made by both partners impacts their entire future life. As such, the Church community, the immediate families of the bride and groom, and the invited guests offer their prayers to support the couple. During this solemn moment, everyone stands to sing the anthem “Veni Creator”, invoking the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit seeks to sanctify the relationship between the couple and grant them the grace of perseverance. The priest and the faithful pray that the love, fortified by God, may serve as a symbol of the love between Christ and the Church. The hymn text includes prayers for clarity of mind, holy love, strengthening of the body, peace, expulsion of evil spirits, divine guidance, rejection of temptations, better knowledge of God, and professing Him (ibid.).

Supported by the prayers of their loved ones and the power of the Holy Spirit, couples wishing to enter into marriage face each other, join their right hands, which the priest binds with a stole, and recite the words of the vows after him. The groom takes the vow first, stating:

“I (the name of the groom), take you (the name of the bride), to be my wife* and I vow to you* love, fidelity*, marital honesty* and that I shall not leave you* till death do us part.* So help me Almighty God and all the Saints.” (*The Rite of the Marriage* 2013)

Then the bride makes her vows by inserting the name of the groom in the appropriate place of the vow and in the sentence “I take you for...” exchanging the word “wife” for the word “husband”.

The use of “I” in the vow emphasises the personal and individual nature of the sacrament. The phrase “I take you”, which appears in both statements, denotes mutual acceptance of each other’s gift and the act of offering oneself as a gift. The gift of self is the ultimate expression of love, beyond any material possession. Love is promised at the outset, along with fidelity, honesty, and a commitment to being constantly present

throughout life. The part of the vow “I shall not leave you till death do us part” applies to all stages of life, including well-being and illness, as well as prosperity and adversity. This fosters mutual trust and gives a sense of security, to both spouses, as well as to their future children. The bride and the groom are aware that their vow is “for better” or “for worse”, and that temptations, difficulties, worries, and their own weaknesses and sins may arise. Therefore, they do not rely solely on their own strength to keep their oaths. Instead, they turn to God in deep faith, hope, and trust for help with His grace. A plea for assistance, mediation, and backing is also extended to all the saints. This entreaty fortifies, empowers, instills a sense of security, and inspires hope.

The confirmation of marriage is expressed by the words of the priest: “‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6). On behalf of the Catholic Church I confirm this marriage which you have contracted between yourselves and I bless it in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (ibid.). As a symbol of their marriage, the spouses also exchange wedding rings, which are blessed by the priest. First, the groom places the wedding ring on the bride’s finger, saying: “(the bride’s name) take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the name of Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (ibid.). Then, the bride reciprocates the gesture by repeating the same words. The rings, as stated in the ceremony booklet, “will henceforth be an eloquent proof and reminder of the vows, they will accompany the days they share, they will be silent witnesses to all that happens” ([The Rite of the Marriage 2013](#)).

Further parts of the ceremony continue with The Universal Prayer and The Liturgy of the Eucharist. The bride and groom are eligible to receive the Holy Communion in forms of bread and wine. A solemn blessing concludes the wedding ceremony.

The religious support of spouses extends beyond the wedding ceremony. In the years to come, it is useful to participate in retreats offered by the Church and in meetings with other Catholic couples; to pray together; and to celebrate Mass, the sacraments, and wedding anniversaries. For the strengthening of vows and the perfecting of the bond of conjugal love, the establishment of spouses in communities and movements of Christian renewal is valuable. In order to properly fulfill the vocation of marriage, it is not only necessary to have the good will of both spouses and the support of other families, but also to participate in well-structured and well-attended premarital preparation courses.

4. Discussion: The Role of Religion in Preparation for Marriage

In his exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II stated that “marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values” ([John Paul II 1981](#), FC 1). The Church is cognisant of this and seeks to convey her teachings and aid those in different life situations. This includes those “who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and assisting the others, the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family. In a particular way the Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life” (ibid.)

4.1. Preparation for Marriage in Poland

The Polish Episcopate developed several guidelines that detail the preparation for marriage ([The Polish Episcopal Conference 1969, 1975, 1989](#)). Additionally, The Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family was compiled by The Polish Episcopal [The Polish Episcopal Conference \(2003\)](#), and it includes comprehensive information on this topic. Work on marriage and the family is conducted in the basic structural unit of the Church, which is the community of the faithful under the leadership of the parish priest, called the parish. The service offered to families in the parish is a permanent form of ordinary pastoral care.

This work involves not only priests, but also lay people, family life counsellors, catechists, spouses in movements for the renewal of the Church, and all those whose witness of life and service with their talents can contribute to the religious formation of children, youth and adults. “In the pastoral programme of the parish, permanent activities will include meetings for young married couples, catechesis for parents, cooperation with parents of children prior to First Holy Communion and young people prior to Confirmation, and preparation of young people and engaged couples for marriage” ([The Polish Episcopal Conference 2003](#), no. 6).

Preparation for marriage is divided into further, proximate, and direct preparation ([The Polish Episcopal Conference 2003](#), nos. 18–33). A crucial aspect of further preparation for marriage is the proper education of children within the family, as well as the demonstration of religiousness and love by the parents through their good example and authentic life of faith. The educational influence of the parents on the children is complemented and confirmed by their involvement in the life of the Church, by the teachings given in the homilies and sermons at Mass, and by religious services, retreats, and catechesis in schools. The responsibility of the older generation for the younger generation necessitates the acquisition of the ability to differentiate between *education for family life*, in line with moral standards, and permissive and depraved *sexualisation*. It is essential to shield children and young people from influences which, under the guise of education, demoralise young people. Love, chastity, adherence to standards, and respect for the personal dignity of the human person (of others and of oneself) are essential values for marriage and family life, and should therefore be promoted with great commitment in education. The Charter of the Rights of the Family, prepared by the Holy See, asserts that “parents (...) must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children” ([Charter of the Rights of the Family 1983](#), Introduction 5). Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the function of institutions should be to aid the parental education process while honouring the beliefs and conscience of individual family members, rather than to undermine, disturb or supplant it.

Direct preparation for marriage involves engaged couples and requires their active participation. This involves: (1) “a talk with a priest in which the engaged couple express their views on marriage, its sacramental nature and indissolubility, on love, fidelity, fertility and respect for the conceived child, on the presence of Christ in their lives and in the lives of their children, on education, etc.” (Polish Episcopal Conference no. 29); (2) the so-called canonical examination, which is essential for assessing the validity of the marriage (that is, the absence of obstacles to its conclusion); (3) lectures given by a priest and a lay family life counsellor; (4) meetings held at a family life counselling centre; (5) a day of recollection; (6) a pre-wedding confession that cleanses and unites the couple with God and people. Another important element of the preparation for marriage should be the analysis of the words of the marriage vows, also through individual reading of publications devoted to it ([Dziewiecki 2023](#), pp. 51–195). This is because it is fundamental for a person who is to keep his or her word to know what he or she is vowing. This comprehension can assist in building a strong marital and family bond, taking responsibility for love, and in developing, nurturing and expressing it.

Preparation for marriage organised by the Catholic Church is conducted using a number of different programmes. The preparation presented in the book *Zaprosili także Jezusa* [*They also Invited Jesus*], whose author, Maria Braun-Gałkowska, is a family psychologist, includes, in addition to the outlines of the classes, homework suggested to the engaged couples. This usually involves conversations on a given topic, the solving of a problem using the principles of correct communication, a selection of biblical readings for the wedding mass, and answers to questions posed ([Braun-Gałkowska 2009](#)). Such activities encourage engagement amongst participants, allowing them to gain insight into different perspectives, express their views, engage in fruitful interactions, and develop problem-solving skills. Engaged couples can participate in Dominican Evenings for Engaged Couples, which offers them an even greater degree of activation in their preparation for marriage, as they have

the opportunity to talk in pairs or in groups, under the guidance of a moderator, who introduces and summarises each topic. Since 1975, the Academic Pastoral Ministry at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin has been conducting pre-marital courses using the workshop method. “This approach enables participants to broaden their knowledge and at the same time be actively involved, so that they acquire skills as well as knowledge” (Braun-Gałkowska 2009, p. 268).

Engaged couples residing in remote areas or working abroad find the weekend intensive programme highly advantageous. The programme presents an array of activities that enable all participants to express their personal opinions, enhance mutual understanding, and engage in meaningful discussions pertaining to raised issues.

The most common form of pre-marital courses includes weekly conferences, in groups of ten, and three individual meetings in Catholic Family Life Counselling Centres. The topics of the lectures cover the theology of marriage, the ethics of married life, and the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage (The Polish Episcopal Conference 2003, no. 30). Some examples of catechesis titles include:

- Who Is Christ for Me?
- What Does It Mean to Believe and to Be a Christian?
- Vocation to the Community of Believers—The Church Is Us.
- God Desires Our Salvation to Occur Within the Church (Sacraments).
- Marriage as a Sacrament (The Liturgy of the Sacrament of Marriage).
- Love in Marriage (Paths and Challenges of Love).
- Building and Sustaining Marital Communion.
- Responsible Parenthood and the Regulation of Conception.
- Children and Creation of Nurturing Environment.
- Shaping Family Life (Religious Life, Organization, Custom).

Assimilation of the knowledge acquired will enable the engaged couples to comprehend the immense spiritual worth of establishing a close relationship with Jesus, founded on his teachings, actions and omnipotent glory. Mary’s conduct during the wedding feast at Cana and her encouraging words, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5b), provide a tangible life pathway for individuals and their families to follow. The example of building a “house on the rock” and the manifestation of God in daily life in Nazareth serve as a model that many can benefit from (Mat 7:24–29). In the age of postmodernism, consumerism, and hedonism, a catechesis on love can have a significant corrective impact, as love can easily be mistaken for infatuation, crush, and lust. Self-centeredness causes one’s desire for the other’s good to be displaced with a desire for personal gratification “by using the other”. Betrothed couples, who are about to make a solemn vow to love each other till death, should understand what true love entails. The Gospel presents love as a vocation, a service, and an eternal gift of self to one another. It teaches that love develops, and that humans should be responsible for its development and for the stage of this development at which they are (Braun-Gałkowska 2009, pp. 45–67; Dudziak et al. 2013, pp. 31–49). Garry Chapman’s knowledge of the five love languages (Physical Touch, Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts) should be shared not only with married couples, but also with those preparing for marriage. It can also serve as a valuable preparation for making love vows and as a sign of a relationship that can demonstrate love. Merely loving one’s spouse is insufficient; expressing this love in a manner that makes one’s spouse feel loved is necessary. And the partner will feel loved if love is expressed to him or her in a language he or she first understands among the five languages of love (Chapman 1995; Chapman and Thomas 2022). Over the course of nearly three decades, in the premarital courses, the author has taught engaged couples the psychology of love, a subject matter that has consistently attracted their attention and proved beneficial, as well as practical, to them. During the workshop activities, the engaged couples completed two unfinished sentences. The first sentence was, “I feel most loved when he/she. . .” followed by what the partner does, says, or gives. The second sentence read, “I try to express my love to him/her through. . .” After completing the sentences, they listened to a lecture on the five languages

of love. Comparing the content of the lecture with the sentences they had written helped them identify their primary love language. Identifying the primary love language of both partners is crucial in facilitating daily expressions of love and ensuring that each partner feels loved by the other. This also contributes to each partner skilfully expressing their love (according to the expectations of the recipient) and (experiencing similar efforts from the other) thus feeling loved.

Theological issues, especially liturgical ones, are addressed by the parish priest in the premarital course, and the ethics of conjugal life, as well as methods of regulating conception, are covered by a lay family life counsellor. During a two-year programme of family studies, aspiring counsellors are instructed in familial, psychological, pedagogical, and medical aspects of this topic. As part of the programme, participants are certified in natural family planning, and they then pass their knowledge on to fiancés during counselling sessions. The sessions prove to be a substantial aid to individuals preparing for marriage. Questionnaire surveys conducted over the years have shown that a significant percentage of fiancés starting the course are unfamiliar with fertility physiology and the methods of natural conception regulation, which aim to identify fertile and sterile days in the menstrual cycle (Dudziak 2022a). The course enables fiancés to overcome this knowledge gap.

The formation of human religious maturity is not only linked to the theoretical presentation of moral standards regulating sexual and procreative behaviour. In addition to this, instilling a sense of responsible parenthood in prospective partners necessitates the imparting of some pragmatic skills. These include: observation of fertility symptoms, preparation of menstrual cycle charts, interpretation of fertility symptoms, and determination of fertile and infertile days in the cycle, according to the symptomatic-thermal method. To transmit the knowledge and skills, individual sessions take place between the engaged couples and a counsellor at the Catholic family life counselling centre. As part of these sessions, both the man, as the future husband and father, and the woman, as the future wife and mother, use workbooks to interpret the fertility charts of several anonymous women. During the last meeting, when the future wife presents her own observations, the fiancé can mark the fertile and infertile days of the couple on the chart. The presence of a counsellor who pays attention to the details of interpretation gives the couple a sense of security and reassurance that the knowledge has been correctly applied. Thanks to the parish counselling centres organised by the Church, along with a team of skilled counsellors, newlyweds start their journey into marriage fully prepared. Their expertise encompasses physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Natural family planning, instead of abortion, abortifacients, and contraceptives, enables the identification of fertile and infertile days in the menstrual cycle. This method provides a foundation for upholding moral standards in the sexual and procreative sphere. As emphasised by subject matter experts, it promotes the physical and spiritual well-being of the husband, wife, and children and serves to strengthen marital bonds, foster family education, and generate beneficial social impacts (Beral et al. 1999, pp. 96–100; Larid 1994, pp. 458–68; Małolepsza 1987, pp. 49–76; Wójcik 2008, pp. 285–93). It is worth noting that medical personnel in health centres do not teach the physiology of fertility, which serves as the foundation of procreative responsibility, nor is it taught prior to the civil wedding ceremony at the Registry Office. It is the Catholic Church which helps couples acquire knowledge, in addition to providing moral teaching, that enables them to practically apply fertility awareness methods in their future married and family life.

4.2. Premarital Courses in Other Countries

It is worth noting that proposals for preparing for Catholic marriage are also available in other countries, such as the Archdiocese of Saint Paul in Minneapolis Minnesota, USA (Archdiocese of Saint Paul in Minneapolis n.d.a). Its website provides “more than 100 questions and 50 conversation topics to ask yourself and/or discuss with your potential future spouse as you discern engagement and marriage”. The authors maintain that “this is a great way to better understand one another and respond to God’s call!” (Archdiocese

of Saint Paul in Minneapolis n.d.b) The questions asked of themselves and each other cover a range of topics including children, faith, sex, goals, marriage, relationships, beliefs, work, career, personal history, and others. These conversations allow engaged couples to examine their own views and plans, gain mutual understanding, and develop communication skills that will benefit their future marriage and family.

The Legacy Marriage Academy, established in the United Kingdom, is an interesting concept. Its aim is “helping prepare and equip couples for a rewarding and fulfilling marriage”. The proposed sessions cover various topics including: Purpose and Function of Marriage, Financial Responsibilities, Emotional and Spiritual Intimacy, Physical Intimacy, Communication and Conflict Management, In-Laws, and Future Intentions. In addition to talks, questions, and suggestions aimed at integrating couples, training videos are also available featuring Byron and Carla Weathersbee, who have prepared thousands of couples for marriage over a period of nearly 30 years. During the countdown to marriage, they want to teach how to love via an online course, ([The Legacy Marriage Academy n.d.](#))

The website that provides information about preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese of Washington starts with the question, “You’re engaged. Now what?” It then proceeds to provide the answer.

1. **“Pray!** It is about a close relationship with the One Who is Love and asking God to bless this relationship and the process of preparing for the wedding that is the beginning of these two’s life as a married couple.
2. **Meet with your priest.** The purpose of this meeting is to complete all necessary paperwork, including the submission of required documents and forms.
3. **Participate in an Archdiocesan Marriage Preparation Program.** The sessions enable participants to gain a deeper understanding of their fiancé/fiancée. Topics covered include self-awareness, communication skills, the meaning of love, marriage, the sacrament of marriage, prayer and spirituality in marriage, finances and marital sexuality, as well as natural family planning. These sessions should be attended as a couple, rather than individually, starting 2–9 months before the wedding day.
4. **Premarital inventory.** Completing the form enables the engaged couple to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, each other, and their relationship. Additionally, it highlights key topics that should be discussed to ensure the longevity of their future together.
5. **Attend Natural Family Planning classes.** NFP is a series of classes, which as authors from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington maintain, “that provides you with the information needed to understand and interpret natural signs of fertility and infertility to either achieve or avoid pregnancy. Natural Family Planning has the added benefit of strengthening your marriage through enhanced communication and intimacy” ([The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington n.d.](#))

The Archdiocese of Washington has an Archdiocesan Office of Family Life that provides significant assistance to future spouses in learning their chosen method of natural family planning. According to their website, natural family planning natural family planning offers the following benefits:

- “It is extremely **effective**.
- It is green. It is **all natural**, completely **safe** and there are **no harmful side effects**.
- It is **morally sound** and completely consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- It is **virtually free** and **very easy to learn** and practice.
- It is **useful** throughout a woman’s reproductive years including breastfeeding, perimenopause, post-partum.
- It is **custom tailored** to each individual woman’s cycle, regular or irregular.”

([Marriage Preparation Archdiocese of Washington n.d.](#))

Those preparing for marriage are informed that “Natural Family Planning is a morally sound and highly effective method for couples to manage their fertility in a way that respects God and each other. Instead of wrestling with their fertility or working against

it; couples are trained to understand, and then cooperate with, their naturally occurring fertility signals in order to make informed and prayerful decisions regarding the growth of their family” ([Natural Family Planning n.d.](#))

The further stages of preparation for Catholic marriage include: planning the wedding liturgy with the priest (readings, prayers, music, hymns, date, and time), **obtaining your marriage license** (if the wedding is planned in a parish other than the engaged couple’s own). With that completed, it remains to take the encouragement of the authors of this programme, expressed in their words: “Celebrate your blessed wedding day!” When solemnising a marriage, the husband and wife are not left without support. It is recommended that they take advantage of available resources. The diocese offers opportunities for couples to “attend marriage enrichment workshops during your marriage or join a marriage enrichment group to gain support in your new Vocatio.” ([Marriage Preparation Archdiocese of Washington n.d.](#))

The Catholic group Our Lady of Bethesda runs the weekend form of marriage preparation at the Retreat House. The programme includes Mass celebrations, prayer sessions, confession, and discussions with retreat participants conducted by priests. Additionally, married couples share their experiences, and professional family life counsellors give lectures. The programme organisers claim that the time spent together and the activities offered strengthen knowledge and love for each other and for God. Listening to speeches, completing questionnaires, and reflecting privately can help couples “deepen their understanding of Catholic marriage—with all of its possibilities and challenges ([Our Lady of Bethesda 2023](#)). The focus inventory is a self-diagnostic tool that helps couples learn more about themselves and their relationship, providing material for conversation and “helping them identify and resolve issues before marriage” (*Ibid.*). Registered couples receive the inventory one week prior to the retreat. The completed forms are then interpreted by the priest leading the retreat, who is also the author of the inventory. A qualified marriage counsellor discusses the results with the couples. The counselling provided by the counsellor, which is also available after the retreat weekend, complements the counselling provided by the priest ([Our Lady of Bethesda 2023](#)).

In Ireland, Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service, located at the Columba Centre in Maynooth, offers pre-marriage courses for couples who choose to marry in the Catholic Church, as well as counselling for couples and individuals. The counsellors in this group aim to explore, reflect on, and work through difficulties that arise in marriage and other interpersonal relationships ([Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service n.d.](#))

The pre-marriage course provides couples with the opportunity to reflect on their communication, understand their commitment to the relationship, acquire conflict resolution skills, prepare for parenthood, and live the sacrament of marriage (*Ibid.*). The course consists of eight modules:

- “Marriage and your Family of Origin and Self-Awareness
- Marriage and how you Communicate
- Marriage and Your Conflict Management
- Choosing the Sacrament of Marriage
- Marriage and Your Commitment
- Marriage and Your being Parents
- Marriage and Your Fertility Awareness and Well-being
- Marriage and Your Sexuality and Intimacy” (*ibid.*).

Apart from discussing the modules, providing relevant materials (e.g., readings from the wedding mass to be chosen by the engaged couple), personal counselling, and individual and couple meetings with a qualified marriage counsellor are available, which can also be conducted online. The Accord Group website offers a variety of resources, including downloads, articles, and answers to frequently asked questions. It also includes links to

useful websites, including publications on preparing for marriage at and information for those planning their wedding in Rome ([Accord Catholic Marriage Care Service n.d.](#))

Another course programme, called SmartLoving Engaged—Online Catholic Marriage Preparation, was developed in 2022 by Byron and Francine Pirola in Australia. ([Pirola and Pirola n.d.](#); [Smartloving n.d.](#)) It was approved for use in dioceses throughout Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the USA, and Asia. Participants of this course receive a PDF workbook and complete the suggested exercises. The course covers topics presented in the following chapters: “Mission to Love”, “Dialogue”, “Knowing Me, Knowing You”, “Building Unity”, “Restoring Unity”, “Sex Sacred Embrace”, “Love Gives Love”, “A Living Sign”, and “Soul Mates for Life”. The entire content spans 204 pages and includes prayers, videos, suggestions for self-reflection, quizzes, and discussion questions. Each lesson builds upon the previous one, and it is expected that a participant will be able to answer at least 80% of the questions correctly to progress to the subsequent stage. Feedback and certificate information can be found on page 201. Upon completion of the course, couples are required to take a final test consisting of individual and joint questions. The answers provided can be used as a basis for discussion with the priest regarding any issues encountered and areas of improvement for the couple. The test is valuable, as it can identify areas that require consideration, providing concrete assistance in building and strengthening the mutual bond of the spouses ([Smartloving n.d.](#))

5. Conclusions

Differences between civil weddings held in Registry Offices and Catholic weddings conducted in churches are evident from the analysis of legal acts and church documents. The offices do not provide courses for engaged couples to prepare for marriage; they solely confirm the marriage’s occurrence. A vow of love is not included in secular marriage vows. The spoken vow involves a pledge to take all necessary actions towards a joyful and enduring marriage. However, there is no assurance of “till death do us part”. The option of civil divorce permits separation, which may occur if the husband, the wife, or both acknowledge an unhappy marital union. Individuals who are emotionally immature may have the belief that they have the right to end a current relationship and pursue a new one. These individuals may have stopped developing their capacity for love and may believe that they are entitled to take without giving anything in return.

Civil divorces, as well as declarations of nullity of marriage due to the immaturity of one or both of the fiancés, indicate the need for even more careful preparation for marriage and verification of the maturity of those deciding to marry. It is crucial for the priest to have a conversation with the fiancés and draw up a pre-marriage protocol, which he must sign to confirm his responsibility. The announcement of the planned marriage in the church after three consecutive Sunday Masses obliges parents, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbours to inform the priest of any obstacles to the marriage. Those preparing for marriage must also have a positive attitude, a responsible approach, and a solid formation. It is not acceptable for someone to enter into marriage without having learned to love. It is also not acceptable for someone to confuse love with fleeting infatuation, lust, selfish pleasure, and the objectification of their spouse when taking on the role of husband or wife. To prevent marital crises, it is essential to provide precise, detailed, and in-depth explanations of the marriage vows to the fiancés. It is evident that an individual who does not comprehend the vow he or she is making is incapable of consciously, faithfully, and joyfully fulfilling it ([Dziewiecki 2023](#), pp. 48–49).

The lack of approval and possibility of divorce in the Catholic Church gives spouses a better chance of trying to resolve any problems that arise, rather than trying to dissolve an indissoluble marriage. If couples acknowledge that “we must resolve the issue, not dissolve the marriage”, they are more motivated and stimulated to take effective measures that will support the well-being of both partners. In rare circumstances where addictions or violence are present, a separation of spouses may occur to facilitate the provision of treatment and psychological therapy. No individual or court possesses the authority to

dissolve a marriage, although it may transpire that a given matrimony was void from the commencement. Nevertheless, such decrees can be avoided if an insurmountable obstacle is identified during the marriage preparation stage. This further underscores the importance and practicality of these preparations, requiring genuine engagement on the part of those involved and the reliability of those in charge of them. Ultimately, dedicating time to something is indicative of its value to an individual. The existence of various forms of premarital courses accepted by the Church provides participants with the opportunity to choose. The choice is left to the discretion of the engaged couple.

The study of biblical passages provides an opportunity to explore the aesthetic and moral meaning of sacramental marriage. The elaborateness of the nuptial ceremony and the celebration of subsequent wedding anniversaries, the time for reflection and thanksgiving, and the invocation of divine assistance provide not only an opportunity for marital joy, but also for psychological and spiritual support. Moreover, couples can avail themselves of comparable aid during retreats they may attend. These events take place not only before Christmas and Easter, but also during weekend marriage encounters or two-week retreats arranged by the Domestic Church Movement. For couples wishing to enhance their conjugal spirituality, participation in formation programmes offered by organisations such as the Focolare Movement, Comunione e Liberazione, Rodzina Rodzin [Family of Families], Rodziny Nazaretańskie [Families of Nazareth], Equipe Notre Dame, and Chemin Neuf can offer valuable opportunities. The relationship between one's religion, general culture, personal treatment, and respect for others should be noted. Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II made notable efforts towards this and played a significant role in promoting it (Osewska et al. 2022).

The role of religion in the lives of marriages and families is evident in the moral standards that safeguard sexual and procreative behaviour. Preserving premarital chastity, marital fidelity, the indissolubility of marriage, and responsible parenthood would help prevent many of the problems that would arise for spouses, parents, and children if these standards did not exist or were no longer accepted (McDowell 1989; Dudziak 2009; Przygoda et al. 2023). Adhering to moral standards enhances the credibility of prospective parents as educators of their own children.

Proper preparation for marriage also involves reading relevant books, discussing them, jointly analyzing their content as an engaged couple, presenting individual perspectives, and providing each other with responses. Interesting questions, tests, insights, and tips for those planning marriage can be found in the following books: Wołochowicz and Wołochowicz (2017)'s *Which Way to Marriage?*, Neil Clark Warren (1992)'s *Finding the Love of Your Life: Ten Principles for Choosing the Right Marriage*, and Walter Trobisch's (1971) *I Married You*.

Premarital courses offered by Catholic parishes teach couples the truth about love and how to identify fertile and infertile days in a woman's cycle, helping them to adopt an attitude of responsibility for love and life. Furthermore, they support the physical, mental, and spiritual health of individuals (Dudziak 2022a). This advantage extends to society, which becomes better when it consists of a greater number of genuinely loving and responsible citizens. A mature approach to life involves recognizing that love can be both given and received, and that it requires nurturing and development. This fosters a decent life and is an expression of the spouses' striving for holiness and the realization of themselves through the proper fulfillment of their vocation.

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Note

- ¹ In the Catholic Church, the Canon of Holy Scripture consists of 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. (Catholic Straight Answers n.d.). According to the Christian tradition (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism), quotations from biblical passages are recorded using an abbreviation derived from the name of the book, along with the chapter and verse numbers.

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