Diocese of Lincoln

Convalidations & Exceptions– Guide

SECTION I: REQUIREMENTS:

A. **Lay couple accompaniment** *(Witness to Love Civil Marriage Initiative, or FOCCUS Convalidations or Mid-Life & Beyond with a facilitator couple, or another approved parish option)*
B. **Premarital inventory** *(You may use any approved option: FOCCUS, Prepare & Enrich, Catholic Couple Check-up, or Better Together)*
C. **An NFP Intro Course** *(for all couples of fertility age)*
D. **Completion of an approved formation course** (for exceptions, catechesis on the Theology of Marriage should be done with the priest or through an approved option, see Section III.)
E. **A brief Theology of Marriage "check-in" with the priest** (after completion of retreat)

Civil Marriages Duration	Requirements
• Married 2 yrs or less	• **Must do all requirements**
• Married 3-19 yrs	• **Requirements may be waived case-by-case at the pastor's discretion; lay accompaniment and formation retreat are still required.**
• Married 20 yrs or more	• **May waive all requirements; but couple must have sufficient understanding and freedom to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage. Strongly encourage evangelization and catechesis on marriage especially for those with little previous formation.**

SECTION II: GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMATION RETREAT:

- **Standard Policy: Engaged Encounter** remains the standard retreat norm.

- **Couples who should attend Engaged Encounter (if possible)**
  - Those married **two years or less civilly**
  - Or couples entering their first sacramental marriage (i.e., at least one spouse has never been married in the Catholic Church)
- **Exceptions for the Standard Retreat:**
  - Couples may select a **virtual or hybrid retreat option** if the pastor determines that the circumstances warrant an exception.
  - Examples include: those living over 150 miles from OLGC Retreat Center (Waverly, NE), work conflict, pregnancy, illness, childcare needs, mature or elderly couples, low-income, disability/mental health exemptions, etc.

SECTION III: BASIC FORMATION FOR EXCEPTIONS:

1. **If your parish is using Witness to Love:** Couples should complete Theology **Sessions 1-6 of the *Be More Marriage Formation Retreat***, which provide basic catechesis of marriage. Life Skills Sessions 1-7 are strongly encouraged, but not required. If the couple does not attend Engaged Encounter and your parish is not using Witness to Love, one of the approved virtual or hybrid retreats in Section IV may be used.

2. **The NFP Intro Course and premarital inventory** may be waived case-by-case with pastor approval for couples civilly married 3 years or more.

3. **All in one self-paced option: Marriage Group (*Living Our Faith in Love) which includes the premarital inventory and NFP Intro Course. Lay accompaniment is still required.*** Preferred Path: A mentor couple can accompany the engaged couple through the course by going through discussion questions with them.

SECTION IV: APPROVED VIRTUAL OR HYBRID RETREAT OPTIONS:

1. ***Best Virtual Self-Paced Retreat Course – Free for WTL Parishes – (Certificate Included)***

   - **Witness to Love: Be More Marriage Formation Retreat:** Self-paced videos. Free for any parish who actively uses WTL mentoring. Witness to Love users have automatic free access through the **Witness to Love Dashboard (Learning Platform).** As of July 2026, the Be More Retreat is only accessible to those with an active WTL subscription. **(English & Spanish)**

2. ***Virtual - Self-Paced Video - Free with Subscription - (No Certificate)***

   - **Beloved on Formed.org (Parts 1 & 2) Free with a parish FORMED subscription. Part 1: Catechesis, (Sessions 1-6), Part 2: Life Skills (Sessions 1-6). Use the Leader's Guide for accountability. (English & Spanish)**

3. ***Best All in One Formation – Fee - (Certificate Included)***

   - **Marriage Group: Pre-Cana*: Self-led, flexible format, All-in-one formation* (Pre-Cana, NFP, Premarital Inventory Included) $199 (English & Spanish)**

4. ***Live or Instructor-Led – Fee - (Certificate Included)***

   - **Engaged Encounter Hybrid:** *Live quarterly zoom retreat for those who can't attend in-person*, Fri – Sun on Zoom. **$285. (***English*)

   - **Catholic Marriage Fellowship:** *Ideal for urgent cases (less than 4 wks. before),* live two-weeknights, **$110**, or self-paced, **$150.** *(English)*

   - **Joy-Filled Marriage:** *Self-paced with live 2.5-hour discussion on Zoom – created by Christopher West,* **$210.** *(English & Spanish)*

   - **Agape Catholic Marriage Prep:** *Self-led, instructor guided via written reflections;* can be tailored for convalidations, military, bilingual, or second marriages; duration: 4-6 weeks (or 2 weeks in urgent cases). **$239-$289.** *(French, Spanish, & English)*

5. ***Hardcopy/No Technology – Fee - (No Certificate); Offered in Vietnamese***

   - **TOBET4Engaged:** *Hardcopy booklet and journal;* Accountability through homework. **$19.99,** bulk discounts available. (*Vietnamese, Spanish, English*