

To save Catholic marriage, we need the whole Church

written by OSV News |

The Road to
**FAMILY MISSIONARY
DISCIPLESHIP**

Forming Marriages and Families to Share the Joy of the Gospel



Co-Authors Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret
With Peter Jesserer Smith

Foreword by Curtis and Michaelann Martin

“The Road to Family Missionary Discipleship” Ryan and Mary Rose Verret with Peter Jesserer Smith, Witness to Love (2023) 203 pages, \$19.95

“Current efforts in standard (Catholic) marriage preparation are not working,” write Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret, in “The Road to Missionary Discipleship: Forming Marriages and Families to Share the Joy of the Gospel.”

It’s hard to imagine anyone disagreeing.

In the last decade, my husband and I have attended nearly a dozen wedding celebrations of Catholic couples. Only three of them took place in church — two nuptial Masses and one Liturgy of the Word.

The rest occurred at catering venues — outdoors, weather permitting. A curious journalist, I’ve always wondered to the couples (or their parents), why the sacrament was so easily sacrificed.

Many couples had already been living together for years before marrying, and Catholicism had not been meaningful to them since fleeing the pews after their confirmations. For them, Pre-Cana (or other programs seemingly unchanged since the 1970s) were deemed useless, unnecessary time-sucks intruding into their busy lives.

In “The Road to Missionary Discipleship,” the authors argue for a full-on marriage catechumenate — deep discipleship formation that takes not weeks, but years: “If the longstanding Pre-Cana classroom approach was a successful model, with its handful of meetings with the priest, we would see more than a marginal impact on Catholic divorce rates, and we would see more couples in church after the wedding.”

The idea of a marriage catechumenate is not new — Pope St. John Paul II envisioned such a program in his 1981 exhortation “Familiaris Consortio,” writing, “only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.”

Pope Francis breathed new life into the subject with “Amoris Laetitia” in 2016, which was followed by the Vatican releasing “Catechumenal Itineraries for Marriage Life” — a comprehensive presentation on “the need for a new catechumenate that includes all the stages of the sacramental journey: the times of preparation for marriage, its celebration and the years that follow.”

In “The Road to Missionary Discipleship,” Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret, along with Catholic journalist Peter Jesserer Smith, national editor for OSV News, do an excellent job of selling all the ways a marriage catechumenate could answer the continuum of ideas and expressed wishes of our three most recent popes, and they make it sound very attractive, indeed.

Who wouldn’t want to see our young engaged couples blessed with a Rite of Betrothal, their faith fed and fostered by their parish community; their marriage mentored and supported, literally for years, by the ongoing presence and prayerful encouragement of others?

But wow, that sounds like a huge commitment of time and availability by all concerned, doesn’t it?

The authors don’t deny it; they realistically and thoughtfully address the truth that in order to

create a successful marriage catechumenate, the Church must possess a well-catechized flock of believers who — on fire with the love of Christ — will agree to be more than six-week volunteers but a Christian community of companions and role models, ready to go some distance on the walk of life, with a family in its tenderest years.

A marriage catechumenate is an ambitious vision, one that, given the roots it must plant and grow within the church, will take not years but decades to fully implement.

It sounds like such a necessary undertaking by the people of God, and it will require rebuilding all of our religious education programs, from the ground up.

Elizabeth Scalia is editor-at-large for OSV. Follow her on X (formerly known as Twitter) @the anchoress.