5 Diocesan Structure: Sponsor Couple “Committee” & Trainers. [8-31-2012]

By Rob Ruhnke

[This was developed as a “working paper” for the Archdiocese of Agana, Guam. It is not exactly what they put into effect, but this “working paper” contains ideas should be considered when creating a “diocesan structure” for establishing and sustaining Sponsor Couples.]

1 - THE RATIONALE FOR THIS “COMMITTEE”1. [See footnote!]

The “Family Life Director” is responsible for marriage preparation and therefore is responsible for the Sponsor Couple Program (For Better and For Ever). However, there may be times when there is no one hired to be the Family Life Director or there may be times when the Family Life Director may have a number of responsibilities in addition to marriage preparation so the establishment of a DIOCESAN SPONSOR COUPLE COMMITTEE is the best strategy for providing leadership and oversight for the Sponsor Couple Program (For Better and For Ever). The Sponsor Couple Committee is to provide:

1 – Consistent diocesan leadership/direction of the For Better and For Ever2 program. While the sponsor couple program is a parish based program and most sponsor couples will function in their own parish, every trained sponsor couple is expected to follow diocesan guidelines for this ministry and be open to sponsoring an engaged couple from another parish if they are asked to assist with the needs of the diocese. Sponsor couples should be aware that they ministry not only for their local parish, but also for their diocese.

2 – The Committee will provide Training of new sponsor couples and enrichment of experienced sponsor couples. This will “free” the local parishes/pastors to focus on recruiting of sponsor couples while assuring the parishes/pastors that the diocese (through the Sponsor Couple Committee) will provide Training and Enrichment of new and experienced sponsor couples.

3 – The Committee will facilitate the record keeping of all relevant data so that there can be communication from the Sponsor Couple Committee to sponsor couples. Enrichment sessions will be offered periodically, “certification” (and re-certification) of sponsor couples, newsletters, additional resources for sponsor couples, etc will be determined and coordinated by the Committee.

4 – The Sponsor Couple Committee will send yearly reports about the status of the sponsor couple program to the bishop and to Marriage Preparation Resources.

5 – The Committee will continue in dialogue with Fr. Robert Ruhnke, Director of Marriage Preparation Resources, to determine ways to strengthen the For Better and For Ever program in the diocese.

1 The term COMMITTEE may carry ~ in Canon Law ~ legal implications that are not necessary or useful for the purpose we have in mind. This is simply a “group of people” appointed by diocesan leaders for a specific ministry.

2 The Sponsor Couple Committee will not be expected to be responsible for other diocesan or parish marriage preparation programs.
2 - THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE SPONSOR COUPLE COMMITTEE.

The Sponsor Couple Committee is appointed by the appropriate diocesan authority and ultimately approved by the bishop. The usual appointment is for a three (3) year term and the person/couple can be appointed again...ordinarily no one would serve more than nine (9) years on the Committee. Nominees are usually made by current members of the Committee, but can be made by the “appropriate diocesan authority” or the bishop.

The members of the Sponsor Couple Committee will be chosen in the light of these responsibilities:

1 – **Coordinator.** This person or couple will be the key “contact person” for the parishes/pastors and will facilitate connecting the Trainers with parishes/pastors. The Coordinator would be paid “by the hour” and would provide a time sheet to the appropriate diocesan leadership. There would be a predetermined maximum limit to the number of hours that can be worked in a year so this pay to the Coordinator can be fitted into the diocesan budget.³

2 – **Trainers.** Would be qualified by the Committee to direct training and enrichment of new and experiences sponsor couples. There should be at least 2 Trainers (a Trainer is usually assumed to be a couple) as soon as possible and then the number of trainers should be determined by the needs of the parishes. The Coordinator could also be a Trainer if/when it is difficult to provide enough Trainers, but the Committee should develop enough Trainers so that the Coordinator is not usually needed for training.

3 – **Others.** Other persons could/should include:
   - Clergy and/or religious who may be of special help to the Committee.
   - Sponsor couples who have significant experience and can be valuable members of the Committee even if they are not needed as Trainers at the current time.
   - Sponsor couples who are “younger” and are being “groomed” to become future Trainers and Coordinators. (it is very important that the Committee plan for the future of the sponsor couple program!)

4 – Total number of members of the Committee will usually be at least five (5) and usually not more than ten (10).

5 – Money!!! The goal is to establish a structure that is so affordable that the diocese will be glad to pay for it because it will be “getting” (in service to the diocese) more than it is paying for. In this plan for the Sponsor Couple Committee, only one person (the Coordinator) receives any payment and this will be a part time “paid by the hour” job that can be “fitted” into the diocesan budget and/or can be managed by grants/gifts. The Coordinator can, of course, opt to serve as a volunteer.

The use of diocesan office equipment, computers, mailings, etc should be tracked and these costs should be included into the ordinary operating expenses of the diocese (e.g. Family Life Office).

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³ The “cost” of paying the Coordinator could become an ordinary expense in the budget of the diocese or it could be an extraordinary expense that is managed by gifts/grants/etc.
Training and Enrichment sessions will be “paid” buy stipends to the Trainers. The money for the stipends can come from parishes (usually parishes pay for the training & continuing formation of sponsor couples) There are other possibilities......including donations and grants.

3 - HOW TO PROVIDE SPONSOR COUPLE TRAINING TO PARISHES.

1 – The parish calls the Family Life Office.4

2 - Family Life Office refers “caller” to COORDINATOR5 (by phone or email) who will:
   - Talk with “caller” to determine needs for training, including language and possible dates6 for the training.
   - Coordinator contacts TRAINERS by email or phone to see who is available and assigns an available trainer to contact “caller.”

3 – TRAINER contacts “caller” to finalize details (we will develop a form to standardize the recording of this information):
   1. Date/place/time of training session.
   2. Whether the prospective couples have used the “old 1989 books” (which complicates training)...it is easier to train those who have never used the 1989 books.
   3. What is the parish plan for widening the invitation to other parishes?
   4. Plan for pre-registration of prospective couples (can use www.marriapreparation.com for this).
   5. Plan for getting video/DVD to prospective couples to view as homework prior to training.
   6. Name and contact information (phone/email) of hosting person who will provide access to building, be present during training, and close up.
   7. Plan for refreshments/snacks during the training.
   8. Plan for getting the books to the training site (caller can order from www.marriagepreparation.com).
   9. Plan for getting data of newly trained sponsor couples to COORDINATOR.
   10. Recording of all expenses7 and stipend for trainer.
   11. Trainer confirms all of this information with COORDINATOR, who forwards relevant information to Family Life Director.8

4 There should be a “diocesan number” to call so this number remains constant when there is a change of Coordinator and/or “Family Life Director”.

5 COORDINATOR is selected by Sponsor Couple Committee (can be a member of the Committee).

6 Each trainer – usually a couple – will have personal specifics/requirements, such as, time (4 hours), overhead, microphone, weekday/weekend, etc.

7 Cost of training (including cost of the books) should be paid by hosting parish, and cost of “guests” should be paid by guest couples or their parishes.

8 The exact relationship between the “Family Life Director” (if there is one) and the Sponsor Couple Coordinator will be worked out each time there is a change in the persons who have these responsibilities.
4 - HOW TO PREPARE TO BE A TRAINER:

1) Read *For Better and For Ever* and fill out all the questions and dialogue with your spouse on all the questions.

2) Study documents: “Key Concepts” and “Text of training videos” (read or download from web site).

3) View training videos.

4) Contact Rob Ruhnke if you have any question/concerns at 210-534-1129.

5) Create your plan for training prospective sponsor couples. The more detail you put into the plan the better….but it is not necessary try to create a “script.” A detailed outline will be sufficient. This can be sent to Rob Ruhnke and shared with other “trainers.”

Some additional thoughts;

1 – The content of training should be the text of FB&FE. Any different/additional material should be approved by Rob because a prime reason for the creation of the 3rd edition was do away with the need for additional materials.

2 – Exceptions to point 1 are the materials recommended in *For Better and For Ever*….the Resources section of the book and the web site (and we can add more resources to the web site as needed).

3 – I, Rob, really need feedback about the usefulness of the videos and how you find them best used to assist with training.

Additional resources for Trainers:

1) **Family of Origin.** *Study of Keeping the Love You Find – A Personal Guide* by Harville Hendrix. Especially complete the Self-Knowledge Inventory and consider sharing this in dialogue with your spouse and/or spiritual director. The purpose of this study is to able to give personal witness of the value of all sponsor couples doing this kind of study and sharing about Imago theory.

2) **Communication/Intimacy.**
   The experience of a Marriage Encounter weekend and the praxis of “daily dialogue” so that you have personal experience with the communication skills taught in *For Better and For Ever*. Also Hendrix’s DVD “Through Conflict to Connection” See [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) for more information.

   *The Five Love Languages* by Chapman.
3) **Meaning of sexuality/marriage.** These are excellent:
   a. *A Daring Promise...A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* by Richard Gaillardetz.
   b. *Sacred Marriage: What if God designed marriage to make us Holy more than to make us Happy?* By Gary Thomas.
   c. *Sex God* by Rob Bell.

4) **Couple Prayer and Family Prayer.** *When Couples Pray Together* by Stoops, *Reminders of God* by Grizzle and *The Blessing Cup* by Travnikar. Are good resources for learning and establishing habits of prayer (and couple prayer) in your marriage. This is essential if you are going to teach prospective sponsor couples the importance of couple prayer for themselves and the importance of having a goal of teaching engaged couples how to pray. See [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) for more information.

5) **Interfaith / Interchurch Marriage.** See [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) for more information.

6) **Natural Family Planning.** See [www.marriagepreparation.com](http://www.marriagepreparation.com) for more information.

7) **Annulments.** Contact your local Diocesan Tribunal for assistance or send email to Rob.