

Christian and Christine Meert | Agape Catholic Ministries' Online, Mentor-Led, On-Demand Pre-Cana Course Helps Couples Internalize Church Teaching, Build Strong Spiritual Foundation for Marriage

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Perhaps you're a Catholic couple who wants to marry. Your Pastor recommends engaged couples to [Agape](#) and gives you a link, but you are unable to find a parish nearby that offers the necessary marriage prep class. Or maybe you've been distant from the church, but now you feel the pull to embrace marriage as a sacrament.



[Agape Catholic Ministries](#), founded and led by French-born U.S. citizens [Christian and Christine Meert](#), offers a [Pre-Cana program](#) that combines the convenience of online and on-demand access with the ability to build relationship with a role-model couple. Its curriculum is inspired by and closely follows Pope John Paul II's [Theology of the Body](#).

Agape Catholic Ministries' pre-marriage course is for those willing to build a strong Christ-centered marriage and works especially well for couples separated by distance, in the military, or with difficult work schedules. The name Pre-Cana comes from the wedding feast where Jesus performed the miracle of turning water into wine recounted in John 2:1-12. This program is featured on the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) website as a valid marriage prep course and is also listed as a resource on the [Archdiocese for the Military Services](#) website, along with many other U.S. dioceses. The nine-sessions are

completed in four to six weeks but can be stretched throughout three months or condensed to 10 days if necessary. Not a video series, a lecture or counseling on Zoom, couples work two-on-two with a certified instructor couple through the portal.



Engaged couples answer online assignments together after they discuss each topic in depth. Worksheets serve a dual purpose: they foster conversation about important aspects of married life, and they provide opportunity to explore spirituality and church teaching. Instructors respond to the answers with personalized feedback. The written back and forth gives the engaged couple time to think and consider important issues that will form the foundation of their marriage. The ministry motto: Building Christ-centered marriages, one couple at a time. The Meerts, who married in 1977 and have five daughters, are now celebrating their 25th anniversary of conducting Catholic Marriage Prep

and their 20th anniversary online. They were the first to offer a Pre Cana course online, Christian noted.

Since 2004, more than 60,000 engaged couples across the globe have gone through [Agape Catholic Ministries' Marriage Prep](#), available in English, French and Spanish. A snapshot of statistics from 2023 reveals how the ministry is reaching those who might not otherwise be able to find a program that fits their specific situation or reconnect with their Catholic roots. 12% have been previously married/widowed, 35% have a partner who is not Catholic, 23% of couples bring children to the marriage, and 21% are seeking to exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Catholic Church after having been married civilly.

The Meerts train instructor couples who are faithful to the Catholic Church's teaching and the Theology of the Body, who live what they teach and build trust with the engaged couple as they work through the content. Mentors of different backgrounds are matched with engaged couples of similar histories, which helps establish the necessary trust. Some are mentors in the military and can share their experiences about military life, older couples build great relationships with older engaged couples. Others appeal to those who exchanged the Sacrament of Matrimony after being civilly married, and the list continues. The program is available in English, Spanish, French and bilingual English/Spanish.

“We find Catholic Marriage Prep an invaluable tool for Military couples. They have the ability for quality and enriching marriage preparation without having to be in the same place at the same time. They are able to be mentored by other military affiliated couples who can address their specific concerns related to life as a Catholic living the military life.”
—Lisa and Mike, an officer of the U.S. Army.



In addition to solid Catholic theology, couples learn life skills that address communication, conflict resolution, finances, family of origin, parenting, and natural family planning. The Meerts designed the course to foster intimate conversations between the fiancées, using the instructors as guides rather than lecturers.

Everything they teach points back to a relationship with Christ, Christian empathized. “We give them the church and the Bible,” Christine added, as they hope to open hearts. “Every couple is unique and different. We build trust with them, and they become vulnerable. Our goal is to help them build their own deep spiritual foundation.”

The Meerts are passionate about interacting with engaged couples, but sheer numbers have caused them to train an additional 35 instructor couples to share the responsibility. They try to personally work with couples who might not have had exposure to or even reject some of the Catholic Church’s teachings that are more counter to a post-Christian culture.

“We challenge them to remain abstinent before they are married and to learn natural family planning,” Christine said. “We challenge them on thoughts about abortion and gay marriage. Christian marriage is not gay marriage. For some couples it is very offensive to say that, and they think the teachings of the church are outdated. We tell them Jesus didn’t have a lot of friends. A lot of disciples left. It is not for the faint of heart.”

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"They are very honest and open with us. We are just there to help and support them. Because we are not on Zoom or face-to-face, we are kind of anonymous, so they open up better," Christine continued. "That's what I like best about this job – working with the couples is my passion," Christian added. "We get

to know them and see them grow."

One engaged couple recounted how valuable they found the experience: "It was a great bonding experience with my wife reading and watching courses and working together and helping one another understand as we go," Johnny wrote. Vanessa echoed, "This has brought a whole new meaning to our relationship. We learned how to live our day to day lives in God's mission. ...we have grown a closer connection to one another."

Pre-Cana lessons include:

1- Knowing You Better

A short form about you and your story.

2- God's Plan for Humanity

God's Plan for man and woman, the origin of marriage and how sin distorted everything.

3- The Sacrament of Matrimony

What is a Sacrament? Why is it important to receive the Sacraments? What is the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony?

4- Formation of Conscience

Why we need to form our conscience to be able to make good and moral decisions.

5- Saying No to Contraception

Why the Catholic Church keeps insisting, in the face of the opposite position held by most of the rest of the modern world, that contraception is one of the worst inventions of our time.

6- The Rite of Matrimony

The promises of the Rite of Matrimony in detail – line by line.

7- Forgiveness / Your Body is a Temple

We will learn how forgiveness is vital to marriage and rediscover the beautiful gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

8- Relationship Tools - A look at the potential problems of conjugal life with solutions, including help to start praying together.

9- Engaged Couple Feedback

A Mission Field in America



While Americans don't usually consider our country as a foreign mission field, the Meerts left France in 1999 to come to America to follow God's call to open a house of prayer in Denver.

After profound conversion experiences in the early 1980s, Christian and Christine and their

daughters joined a French Catholic lay community, leaving behind their jobs, friends, and house. In 1999 Archbishop Chaput invited the Meerts to be in charge of the new mission in Colorado.

"We didn't know what we were going to do when we got to Denver," Christine said. "We opened the Bible and read the passage where God told Paul to 'Go to Damascus, and there you will be told what you will do.' So, we went!"

The Archbishop asked them to begin teaching an in-person marriage prep class for the Archdiocese of Denver that they modeled after the teachings of Theology of the Body. The office of Marriage and Family Life of the Archdiocese of Denver later asked the Meerts to help a couple living on the Rocky Mountains' western slopes unable to attend a Marriage Prep class in Denver. Christine suggested they complete it via email. This approach allowed for fruitful one-on-one mentoring, which gave rise to the idea for the Marriage Prep website.

After fourteen years, Christine and Christian felt called to dedicate themselves fully to the

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strengthening of marriage, building the website and forming CatholicMarriagePrep.com in May of 2004. Their first out-of-state (and out-of-country) couple who found their resource was a pair of English teachers from Ireland who were working in China.

Christine remembers their experience as “really awesome. We had a good relationship!” A connection with their youngest daughter’s teacher helped them refine their processes. They streamlined their style to incorporate a heuristic method, encouraging people to think for themselves instead of just ingesting information.

Christian described the pattern as following the way Jesus talked with his disciples. “He asked, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ and that’s when Peter said, ‘You are the Christ.’ That’s what we are doing. Instead of just lecturing, we are asking them to go inside, think about what a passage in the Bible says to them and make the teaching their own. The second question of the class is, ‘Who is God to you?’ They have to try to realize who God is to them, really. Then we open dialogue. That’s the method.”

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In July 2005, Bishop Michael J. Sheridan, Bishop of Colorado Springs, hired Christian and Christine to run the Office of Marriage and Family Life in his diocese. In 2010, at the request of several priests, Agape Catholic Ministries developed a [Quinceañeras preparation program](#) to help Hispanic teen girls face cultural challenges. In 2012 Pastors asked the Meerts to take on [infant baptismal preparation and enrichment classes](#) to help married couples and families to be stronger in their faith and relationships.

Endorsement from Colorado Springs Bishop James R. Golka:

“Agape CatholicMarriagePrep.com is a trusted resource which not only presents the Church’s understanding of Marriage as a Sacrament but it also provides a wonderful way for the couple to spend time clearly communicating and connecting with each other. Couples who have used this resource report how helpful it is in enhancing their relationship with each other and their connection with the Church.”

99.37% of people who have taken the course report they were very satisfied with the program, Christian said.

The Meerts remind couples how important it is to get involved with the church after the wedding — whether it’s teaching religious education, singing in the choir or joining the Knights of Columbus. Couples who complete their course stay connected with their parish — 98% responding they want to stay active and practice their faith.

“We know from experience that marriage prep is a unique opportunity for evangelization. Our goal is to open the hearts of the engaged couples to the love of God and build Christ-centered families,” Christian said.



Christian and Christine

Couples around the world benefit from a renewed connection to the Catholic Church and an opportunity to have their marriage blessed as a sacrament through [Agape Catholic Ministries](http://AgapeCatholicMinistries) — even if distance or time constraints present obstacles to traditional in-person marriage prep classes.

