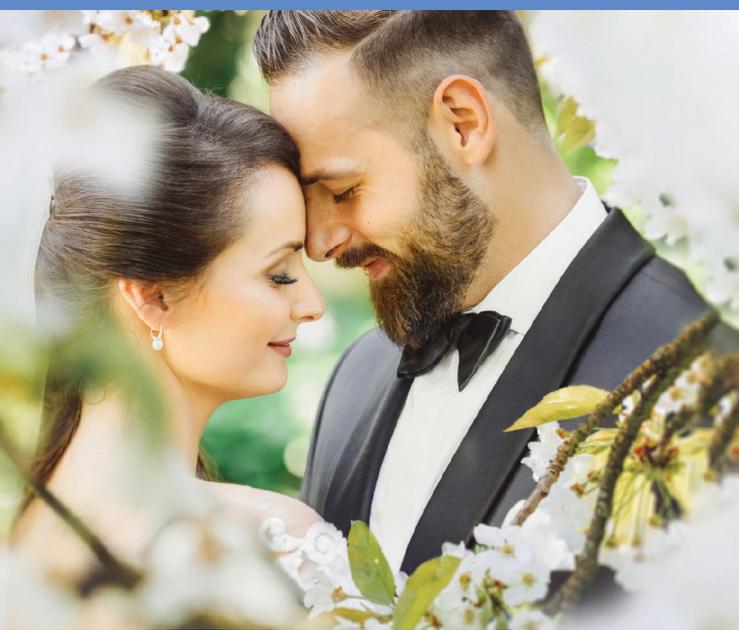


Beloved to One Another, Beloved to God



“The way God’s covenant with us was presented [in BELOVED] moved our hearts when we thought we knew it all.” –Caty Burke

Lisa Everett and Caty Burke

Director and Associate Director for Marriage and Family Ministry
Diocese of Ft. Wayne-South Bend, IN

An unexpected blessing of the COVID-19 pandemic was the opportunity that Lisa Everett and Caty Burke had to review and rethink the marriage preparation program for the Diocese of Ft. Wayne-South Bend in Indiana. Everett serves the diocese as director for Marriage and Family Ministry, while Burke is the associate director.

“We evaluated all the marriage preparation programs on the market,” Everett said. “We believe that *Beloved: The Mystery and Meaning of Marriage* communicates the truth and beauty of the Church’s vision of the vocation and sacrament of marriage in an exceptional way for engaged couples today.”

The Augustine Institute’s BELOVED explores the human, spiritual, moral, and intellectual aspects of the Sacrament of Matrimony, Everett said.

In addition to BELOVED, the diocesan marriage preparation incorporates the Pre-Marriage Course from Alpha International, which covers issues related to human formation and facilitates important conversations between fiancées, using a course journal.

When the diocese launched its new marriage preparation program in January 2022, it began offering weekend BELOVED retreats in English and Spanish for engaged couples.

The diocese runs approximately ten pre-marriage retreats a year—six in English and four in Spanish. While the English-speaking couples meet from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, the Spanish-speaking couples meet from Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon. That’s partly due to the reality that many Spanish-speaking couples are already civilly married and are having their marriages blessed.



“We’ve had a lot of good feedback from priests whose couples came back talking about the retreat.”

–Lisa Everett



Lisa Everett



Caty Burke

“We try to open their hearts to God in a deeper way and to each other in a deeper way,” Everett said.

The time away gives couples the chance to really talk to one another.

“This is the person who’s going to get you to heaven,” Burke said.

Some of the retreats are held at the Sacred Heart Parish Center on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. When couples arrive on Friday, they are reminded of Jesus’ entry into public ministry at an elaborate, days-long wedding celebration.

“We try to make everything lavish for the couples,” Everett said, “to convey to them in a very concrete way the lavishness of God’s love for them. It is no coincidence that Jesus performed his first miracle for a married couple at the wedding at Cana.”

Over the course of the weekend, the couples watch the first five sessions of BELOVED. The couples are exposed to different kinds of prayer, have the opportunity to go to confession, and spend some time in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Throughout the weekend, there are group discussions and times for each couple to discuss privately what relates to them personally.

“We wanted them to go deeper together,” Everett said. “It’s more life-giving when they can be open and honest with one another.”

The weekend gives the couples the chance to get to know other engaged couples, especially on Saturday evening when they play a Sherlock Holmes-inspired murder mystery game.

On Sunday, the group attends Mass at a local parish, returns to the site of the retreat for a luncheon, and hears witness talks from married Catholic couples.

“The witness couples are important,” Burke said, “especially for those who didn’t have a witness of Christian marriage growing up.”

The last component of the marriage preparation program is for couples to attend an online overview session dedicated to Natural Family Planning. The couples become familiar with the themes in Pope Saint John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, listen as instructors explain the methods of Natural Family Planning, hear a talk from a witness couple, and have the opportunity to ask questions.

Burke and her now-husband watched sessions of BELOVED before they were married.

“The way God’s covenant with us was presented moved our hearts when we thought we knew it all,” Burke said.

She praised the series’ beauty, cinematography, music, and sacred art. The couples see, she said, that they are not only beloved to each other, but beloved also to God.

As they’ve watched couples during the weekend retreats, Everett and Burke have seen great fruits.

“The conversations they’ve had have been life-giving and, in some cases, life-changing,” Everett said.



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