



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A P R E - M A R R I A G E R E T R E A T

Before We Begin

A three-day retreat for engaged couples — preparing spiritually for the sacrament of marriage by meeting the God who is the ground of the covenant you are about to make.



Sacred Paths Retreat Series

Before You Begin

Why a silent retreat before marriage · How this retreat works · What to expect

You have probably attended a pre-marriage program — the classes, the questionnaires, the conversations about finances and conflict and family of origin. Those things matter. This retreat is for something else: the interior preparation. The question of who you each are before God, individually, before you stand before him together.

This retreat includes both individual and shared prayer times. The individual periods are essential — marriage joins two people without erasing two individuals, and knowing your own interior life is the foundation of everything that follows.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

— Genesis 2:24

BEFORE YOUR FIRST PRAYER PERIOD

Each person writes separately — do not share yet

- Why do you want to marry this person specifically? Not the general reasons — the particular ones.
 - What do you bring to this marriage that is a gift? What do you bring that will require grace?
 - What are you most afraid of about marriage?
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Day One: Who I Am

Theme: Knowing yourself before you give yourself · Individual identity and belovedness

Before two people can truly become one, each must know who the one is that they are offering. Today we go inward — individually — to receive a clearer picture of the self that is entering this covenant. Not to discover flaws to be fixed before the wedding, but to know the person God is giving to your future spouse.

INDIVIDUAL MORNING PRAYER · 45 MIN

Beloved before anything

Read Matthew 3:13–17 and Psalm 139:1–18 separately. Sit in silence for twenty minutes with this question: Who am I, apart from this relationship? What is the self that I am bringing to this marriage — my particular gifts, my particular wounds, my particular history with God?

Journal: Write a letter to your future spouse describing who you actually are — not who you want them to think you are. This letter is only for you. But writing it honestly will be the most important thing you do in this retreat.

SHARED PRAYER MOMENT · 20 MIN

Reading together

Come together and read Song of Solomon 2:10–13 aloud, taking turns with the verses. Then sit in silence together for ten minutes. No conversation yet — simply be present to each other and to God. Then share one word that rose in you during the silence.

“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”

— Song of Solomon 2:10

INDIVIDUAL PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The family you came from

Read Ephesians 3:14–19 — Paul's prayer for the family of God. Then pray with your own family of origin: What did your family give you that you want to carry into your marriage? What did your family give you that you will need grace to leave behind? What has God been doing in your family story that you can see now but could not see before?

This is not about blaming your family. It is about knowing your own inheritance — so that you can choose, with awareness, what you transmit.

Evening

Sit together and read 1 John 4:7–12 aloud. Then share — briefly, without pressure — one thing each: what you are most grateful to God for about this relationship. Then pray

together, simply, before sleep. The prayer can be as short as: 'Thank you. Help us. We trust you.'

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”

— 1 John 4:7

Day Two: Who We Are

Theme: Two becoming one · The covenant and its cost · Building on the right foundation

Marriage is the most demanding spiritual formation program available to human beings. It will form you in ways nothing else can — because it places two imperfect people in close proximity with no easy escape and asks them to love each other as an act of will, day after day, through seasons that neither romanticism nor realism fully prepared them for.

SHARED MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Building on the right foundation

Read Matthew 7:24–27 — the parable of the two builders. Then ask together: What is the rock on which we want to build this marriage? Name it specifically. Not a feeling, not a shared interest, not even a shared commitment to each other — but the specific bedrock. Pray together that God would be that rock.

INDIVIDUAL PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The honest reckoning

Go separately. Read Colossians 3:12–17 — the list of virtues that constitute the Christian household. Then journal honestly: Which of these virtues do I bring to this marriage? Which will require the most growth? Where am I most likely to fail my future spouse — and what do I most need from God to meet that challenge?

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

— Colossians 3:14

SHARED PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The conversation you need to have

Come together. Each person shares — from what arose in individual prayer — one gift they bring and one area where they will need grace. The listening partner does not fix, defend, or minimize. Simply receive. Then pray together: 'Lord, we bring what we actually are — not the idealized version — and we ask you to be the grace in the gap between who we are and who we want to be for each other.'

Evening

Read Ruth 1:16–17 aloud to each other — the great covenant speech. Then sit in silence for ten minutes. Before sleep, each person writes one page in their journal: a love letter to their future spouse that describes the covenant they intend to keep.

Day Three: Who We Will Become

Theme: The mission of your marriage · The domestic church · Sent together

A marriage is not only a private arrangement between two people who love each other. It is a witness. It is a small church — a domestic church — whose faithfulness or unfaithfulness to love shapes everyone around it: children, friends, community, the world. Today we ask: what is the mission of this particular marriage?

SHARED MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

The wedding at Cana — and what Jesus provides

Read John 2:1–11 together. A wedding runs out of wine. Mary notices. She tells Jesus. He provides — and provides abundantly, beyond what was needed. The first miracle is for a wedding.

Sit with this image together: the God who attended the wedding at Cana attends yours. He notices what runs out. He provides what you cannot manufacture on your own. What are you most likely to run out of? What do you most need him to provide?

INDIVIDUAL PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The Suscipe — for an engaged person

Go separately and pray the Suscipe prayer below. Pray it as an offering of yourself to God — and to your future spouse. Then journal: What am I most afraid to offer? What am I most glad to offer?

THE SUSCIPE



*Lord, take and receive all that I am —
the self I am bringing into this marriage,
the love I am capable of and the love I still need to learn,
the future I am entering and the fears I carry into it.
You have given me this person to love.
Help me to love them as you love them —
knowing them fully, choosing them daily,
remaining when it costs something to remain.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough to make this marriage holy.*

— After St. Ignatius of Loyola

SHARED CLOSING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Three questions — discussed together

1. What is one thing each of us will do differently in our engagement because of this retreat?
2. What is one spiritual practice we will commit to as a couple in our first year of marriage?
3. What is one sentence — a shared intention for our marriage — that we want to write down, sign, and keep?

Go, beloved couple

You are not yet married. But you have already begun the most important work of marriage: the honest, prayerful, God-centered examination of who you are, what you bring, and what you are building together. The wedding day matters. This retreat matters more. Go and love each other well.

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

— Ecclesiastes 4:12

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

PRACTICE

The daily prayer of one minute

From your first day as a married couple: before sleep, each person names one gift and one gratitude from the day. Sixty seconds. Every night. This practice builds a marriage over decades in ways that grand gestures cannot.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

For marriage

- Genesis 2:18 — It is not good for man to be alone
- Proverbs 5:18 — Rejoice in the wife of your youth
- Song of Solomon 8:6–7 — Love is strong as death
- Malachi 2:14 — The Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth
- Matthew 19:6 — What God has joined together
- Romans 12:10 — Love one another with brotherly affection
- Hebrews 13:4 — Marriage is to be held in honor