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'Little church' domestic church, or little church, formed through sacrament of marriage

For the next few months, New Earth will share a series of articles about the sacrament of marriage and the marriage preparation process that were written by Father Al Bitz, rector of St. James' Basilica in Jamestown. This is the first in the series.

It is a joy to do marriage preparation. The sacrament of marriage is such an important and vital part of who we are as church. Most of our people experience God in and through this sacrament. In this article, I will try to focus on what I feel are very important parts of the preparation for marriage today.

First of all, I congratulate the couple and thank them for their willingness to accept God's call to this sacrament, to this vocation, to be bonded in marriage for service to others.

There are many facets to the preparation process: meetings with the priest or deacon; taking the FOCCUS Inventory, which helps the couple examine their faith and values and vision; going to an engaged encounter or marriage preparation weekend; taking the course on Natural Family Planning; planning the Marriage Liturgy; doing all the necessary paperwork.

I give them a sheet of all the steps in the process, which they can check off as they complete them.

However, the reason the church is involved and is the most important part is that through the sacrament of marriage their home is set aside as a "Little Church" (Domestic Church) and they are ordained to be the ministers of that "Domestic Church."

Their role as the ministers, their function, their responsibility, their vocational call is to love one another. This is quite simple, but it is also the challenge.

Through the sacrament, they are gifted with and share in the very unity and love of the Trinity. Thus, in and through their unity and love for each other they make visible God's love to each other, to their children, to their family and friends — to all the people around them.

Isn't this an awesome calling? Isn't this an awesome challenge? Isn't this an awesome vocation?

They are called to make visible and be the very heart of God in the world— the Trinity, who is at the core of revelation and our faith. This is why the Trinity icon is such a fitting piece of good religious art for their home, their Domestic Church.

Some decades ago, it was the custom that the parents of the newlyweds would always make sure they received the sick call crucifix. I feel that a Trinity icon is something that today would be an excellent, beautiful and life-lasting gift from parents — a gift from one "Little Church" to another.