

LOVE CIRCLE MATTERS

A Starter Kit for New Love Circles





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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of a Love Circle

The idea of a Love Circle is to bring together couples who want to nourish the seed that was planted on their original Marriage Encounter Weekend, to realise that we never arrived", and that we are always striving to grow closer to our spouse and to God.

Through the Love Circles, we hope to build a loving community through a series of sharing sessions that strengthened spousal relationships, foster community love and developed relationships.

The objective of this handbook is for newly formed Love Circle Leaders to start off with 'tested programs' that will help the love circle get off to good start. It is our greatest wish that your love circle continues to meet regularly using existing additional materials or to develop their own using the guidelines given. We hope you will find it useful. The topics of these programs include"

- 1) Trusting
- 2) Spouse
- 3) Self
- 4) God
- 5) Prayer
- 6) Community
- 7) Reaching Out

Additional Love Circle materials have also been added to this handbook and can be used as appropriate. The topics are

- 1) Valentine
- 2) Advent

1.2. Love Circle Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- What is the Love Circle journey about?

Ans: It is a loving circle of ME Weekend participants to journey together and to support each other to develop and entrench the dialoguing habit.

- Am I required to do open sharing at the LC meetings?

Ans: You do not need to share openly in the LC meetings if you do not wish to.

- What do we do at the LC meetings?

Ans: We start by singing love songs, then read some inspirational passages, followed by doing a 10/10 dialogue on the given question. There may be other activities from time to time to provide a variety. After that, it is fellowship over drinks and tidbits



- How long does the LC meeting last?

Ans: We usually aim to start by 7.30pm – 8.00pm and end by 10pm – 10.30pm.

- What happens when only one spouse can attend the LC meetings?

Ans: It is fine for one spouse to attend. The LC Program notes and dialogue question can be brought home and shared with the absent spouse.

- Can we bring our children to the LC meetings?

Ans: Yes you can if the host of the LC meeting is fine with it. Many times, the children of the couples become firm friends from the LC meetings as well.

- Where are LC meetings held?

Ans: Usually, the LC meetings are rotated amongst the couples. There should be minimal fuss in hosting the LC meetings. It should be as simple as possible. The hosting couple needs to only provide water or simple packet drinks. Sitting on the floor is also fine.

- How frequent are the LC meetings?

Ans: LC meetings are held once a month.

- What happens if both of us cannot attend the LC meetings?

Ans: It is ok. Just let the LC co-ordinating couple know and come for the next one.

- Who is in charge of organizing the LC meetings?

Ans: There will be an LC co-ordinating couple selected to just inform every one of the date, time and place of the meeting.

- Will the presenters also attend the LC meetings?

Ans: The presenters will attend the LC meetings as long as they can until the Love Circle can run on its own.

- Why should we attend LC meetings?

Ans: The LC meetings help to slowly build up the habit of dialoguing. It is also encouraging to be journeying with like-minded people to give each other mutual support and encouragement.

- What are the benefits of attending the LC meetings?

Ans: Many times, we leave an LC meeting feeling re-charged and energized. A bit like how it was after the original weekend.



- If the attendance at our LC meetings dwindle, how can we continue in our LC journey with other ME couples?

Ans: Please approach your presenters who will link you up with the Love Circle Link Service Team to merge with another ongoing LC, or the presenters may even co-ordinate the merger themselves.

- When will the LC meetings stop?

Ans: The LC meetings may stop when the dialoguing habit has been ingrained and the participants feel that they can continue on their own. Sometimes it continues because of the fellowship and friendship forged.

- If we decide to leave our original LC group, how do we join another LC group?

Ans: Please approach your presenters or the Love Circle Link Service Team members for assistance.

- If we stopped attending LC meetings for a while but decide to come back to it, what do we need to do?

Ans: You can contact the LC co-ordinating couple, the presenters or the Love Circle Link Service Team.

- I travel frequently, can we attend other LC meetings where the timing is suitable?

Ans: Yes, you can. Just approach the presenters or Love Circle Link Service Team for help.

1.3. Planning Love Circles

1.3.1 Philosophy

1. The development of Love Circle Programs must be the responsibility of the members of each circle.
2. This is a necessary attitude because growth can be experienced through planning. This is the outgrowth of responsibility and commitment.
3. Programs are starters for dialogue within the Love Circle. And dialogue is only a tool. Every tool that we use, if aimed carefully and creatively. can give a very useful force.
4. We must keep hold of what we are doing, aiming the tool in the right direction to get the most benefit. This entails our choosing programs and questions that are relevant to us as a unique group. They must be relevant to the stage we are at in the here and now, or to themes that keep cropping up in our relationship



- because we are not dealing with them properly.
5. Love Circles are extensions of the couple's dialogue. It is not an evening for the couple to dialogue when they have been putting their relationship on hold prior to the evening.
 6. Love Circles must reflect the desire as members of a faith family getting together to strengthen one another. It is a necessary part of the life of the Church to come together to share, reflect and pray.

1.3.2. Suggestions to formulate programs for the evening

Choose programs:

1. that we are at in our relationship. Most couples experience the same situations
2. that are based on the concepts of the Weekend
3. that are issues of the day
4. that challenge us to evaluate our relationship
5. that help us to grow towards Jesus
6. based on external sources - movies, TV, books, articles, etc.
7. based on festivals and celebrations

The choice is limited only by our lack of imagination

1.3.3. Tips for preparation of presentation

1. After deciding on the program for the evening you must develop it for the love circle.
2. Use questions to help you prepare the presentation. Keep to questions that help you keep in focus the program
3. Keep to a narrow area for each evening. Trying to develop a Program that try to cover everything in one session is to try to achieve the ultimate in your relationship with one dialogue.
4. The most important thing is to be logical in our planning. Put everything down on paper. Your couples can't read your mind.
5. If all else fails, try asking for help.

1.3.4. Pitfalls to avoid in planning Love Circles

1. Don't try to cover everything you have on paper. When the sharing is progressing excellently, don't disrupt it to go into other matters.
2. The Program should not last for more than two hours
3. Plan for a bit of socialising before or after the Love Circle as open communication with one another helps us to grow.
4. However, don't allow your Love Circle to degenerate into a social gathering, and worse still, a gossip circle.
5. No one should be allowed to monopolise the evening
6. Uncalled-for suggestions when somebody shares his/her gut feelings should never be allowed.

1.4. Marriage Encounter Concepts

In designing love circle program. we should consider the concepts of the Marriage Encounter Weekend. Using one of the concepts as a theme, we weave appropriate songs, passages, pictures and activities around it for reflection and sharing, not forgetting questions for couple dialogue.

1. Self Awareness - Who am I?

Getting in touch with ourselves is the first step to communicating ourselves to others.

2. Feelings indicate needs

Feelings change all the time. Acknowledging feelings enables us to identify our needs and to work towards meeting those needs. Feelings will resurface if we do not come to terms with them.

3. Four basic needs

We have endless needs but they could be grouped under four areas

- need to be loved and to love,
- need to belong,
- need for self-worth and
- need for autonomy

4. Thoughts and feelings

Distinguish between thoughts and feelings. We tend to express thoughts instead of feelings. Thoughts are judgmental and lead to criticisms. Feelings enable us to know one another better.

5. Feelings are neither right nor wrong

Feelings of themselves are neither right nor wrong. How we act on the feelings make it right or wrong.

6. Feelings affect relationship

Feelings affect our behaviour and communication. Knowing our feelings, we can then identify our needs and take steps to meet them. Knowing our feelings, our spouse will understand our behaviour and appreciate us better and because we can share our feelings, our communication deepens.

7. We are responsible for our own needs

We cannot expect our spouse to fulfil our needs. Our spouse, knowing our feelings, will be in a better position to help us identify our needs, be more receptive of our behaviour and be more concerned and loving, but ultimately, we have to meet our own needs.

8. Mask

Projecting the part of us that is easily acceptable by others, rejecting ourselves in the process. Intimacy in our relationships is absent because others cannot experience the frustrations, the fears etc. that lie behind our mask.



9. God does not make junk

Each of us is unique and we are showered with gifts irrespective of our status in life. God loves us and is with us all the time.

10. Marriage in the Modern World

Blindly adopting a lifestyle directed by the social and cultural values of the day may cause us to lose our identity as well as any meaning in our marriage. We must be in control of our lives and not allow the media or other agencies to dictate the way we should live.

11. Married Single State/Attitude

To be preoccupied with ourselves, seeking fulfilment, appreciation etc., at the expense of our relationship with our spouse is being irresponsible.

12. Love is a decision

Love is not just a feeling. We often need to make an effort to love despite all odds. Likewise, we need to allow ourselves to be loved, to die to our pride.

13. Confrontation

Being right is not important but fighting for our relationship is. It shows that we care for our relationship. We want to improve our relationship, not destroy it. Toleration cannot meet our needs.

14. Dialogue

Dialogue enables us to know and appreciate each other better. Make time to dialogue, to the level of feelings. Dialogue is the key to communication. Dialogue is a tool to help us look deeper into each other's soul and be aware of the beauty that is hidden within.

15. Death

We don't talk about it because it involves very deep feelings. Getting in touch with our deep inner feelings sets us free from our doubts and fears and helps us to know each other better as we appreciate and accept each other in our nakedness.

16. Marriage in God's Plan

Two in one flesh. To live God's plan for marriage is to experience this oneness through a relationship that is open, honest and complete.

17. Risk and Confidence in Dialogue

Unless we are open in our dialogue, we will continue to feel insecure. Unless we make ourselves vulnerable, our spouse will not be able to know us deeply and love cannot be fully experienced when healing is absent

18. Sex

Sex is the ultimate expression of love in a marriage and has a therapeutic effect on our relationship. It is important for us to know from time to time how each feel about our sexual relationship. Dialoguing on sex is important as it is the deepest form of communication in a couple's relationship.



19. Non-verbals

Our expression tells a great deal about what is going on inside us. We have to be constantly aware of each other's non-verbals in our relationship. A loving touch can mean that all is well. A sullen look betrays a host of negative feelings.

20. Listening is a choice

Listening is a choice. To stop whatever we are doing in order to listen to our spouse is a decision to love.

21. Barriers to listening

All of us have unhealthy listening patterns which we need to eradicate if we long for a more meaningful relationship. We often cut our spouse short. We often arm ourselves with our replies even before our spouse could finish speaking. Very often we give uncalled-for suggestions when what is really needed is our whole-hearted attention to what our spouse has to say.

22. Listening with our hearts

Listening is different from hearing. In hearing, only our ears are involved. Listening pertains to the heart. Listening with our hearts is important. It enables us to experience our spouse fully. Listening with our hearts is life-giving.

1.5. Rules of Sharing

Sharing is an integral part of a Love Circle meeting. As mentioned in the Love Circle Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) above, you do not need to share openly in the LC meetings if you do not wish to. However, we encourage all couples to share if it would be beneficial to others in the group who may be facing the same situation. It is in sharing that we grow in our relationship as well as helping others to grow.

When sharing, do take note of the following rules so that everyone benefits fully from it.

- Share with your spouse before sharing with others
- Keep your sharing short and to the point
- Share about yourself and not about your spouse or others.
- When someone is sharing, listen quietly and don't ask questions, make suggestions or pass any comments.
- Sharing is voluntary. You may pass if you don't want to share, but remember that sharing is a special gift you can give to others.
- Sharing is confidential. Don't repeat what you have heard.

1.6. Additional Love Circle Materials

Over the years, Worldwide Marriage Encounter Singapore has developed or adapted new love Circle materials that are either listed on our website (<http://wwwmesg.org/lc-resources/>) or are circulating within the community.

Do check with your weekend presenters or the Love Circle Link Service team if you need additional Love Circle materials.

1.7. Ideas for Love Circles

The Love Circle coordinator's concern is to get the group to come together for meaningful interactions. They can do this in various ways. One way is to use existing materials or very often the group would be asked to suggest activities to make the gatherings more exciting and purposeful.

Activities may be related to the special occasion of the month, such as New Year, Valentine Day, Easter, Fathers' Day, Mothers' Day, Children's Day, Advent, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Wedding, Anniversaries, etc.

It is important to remember not to reduce the gatherings to a happy hour or just plain social gatherings for they soon disintegrate as the meaning is lost. The following are some ideas which you may wish to consider:

1. Reminders

Send out reminders for Love Circle meetings. Reminders can be in the form of a Whatsapp group chat, emails, card or a letter.

2. Newsletter

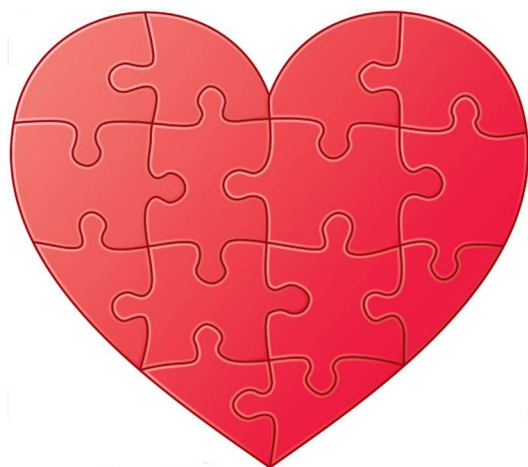
For those with more enthusiasm and vigour, they may want to keep the group informed of the things that are happening among the little group. This can be in the form of a card or a letter also.

3. Wedding Anniversary reminders

Home-made cards. e.g., in the shape of ME logo could be circulated during Love Circle meetings for couples to write short love notes to the couple concerned.

4. Valentine Day Celebration

Big heart shape (vanguard paper) cut into jig-saw pieces (depending on the number of couples attending)



One piece per couple
e.g. 6 couples ~ 6 big hearts

At the Love Circle meetings - couples will write short love notes on the jig-saw pieces
Exchange of gifts (items that have hearts on them - not more than \$10/ ~ perhaps)

5. Advent Wreath

Preparation in late October. Couples to share and help each other in the making of the Advent Wreaths. The experienced couple will buy materials e.g. crepe paper, wire, candles, polyform, aluminum foil for the wreaths.

To light one candle each week during Advent.

To meet again during Christmas (bring wreath to Love Circle)

Couples to bring their young children along

Potluck dinner





6. Prayer Alert

This is a system whereby couples in the Love Circle could be contacted to pray for those who are facing a crisis.

Explanation of 'PRAYER ALERT'

- a) If prayer is required for the members of the Love Circle (including family members), call the designated couple so that they can initiate "PRAYER ALERT". Sufficient details as to the nature of the matter, e.g. , background information as to the name of the hospital and the ward number (if hospitalised).
- b) The designated couple will then pass the message down via the WhatsApp chat group.
- c) Persons who have requested "PRAYER ALERT" (or who are involved) may also be called via the system.
- d) At the date and time agreed upon, we should spend a couple of minutes to pray for the need expressed.
- e) "PRAYER ALERT" is to be used only for serious events.

7. Daughters' Day

Love circle coordinator to choose a day to be set aside as 'daughters' day'. Couple to write letter and gift to their daughter if they have any Sharing during Love Circle meetings will focus on relationships with daughters

8. Sons' Day - same as above

9. Reconciliation Day

Story for reflection

How Muhammad taught forgiveness - a story

A Muslim likes to pray to God. He prays five times a day. The Prophet Muhammad often went to the mosque to pray. He found it a cool and peaceful place to worship the one God. The quiet of the mosque reminded him of the pleasant evenings in the desert, so different from the bustling noisy town. At the beginning a lot of people disliked Muhammad for his dislike of idols. He told them it was wrong to be unkind, He told them it was wrong to be cheats and liars. Many people found it easier to be unkind than to be good and generous.

One woman, who did not like Muhammad, used to sweep her dust and rubbish over him as he passed her house on his way to the mosque. The Prophet always turned head, and smiling would say to her in the way he would greet a friend, 'Assalamu alaikum.' That only made her more furious and she swept more dust over him. One day, as Muhammad

came near the woman's house, she was nowhere to be seen. He immediately asked the neighbours where the lady was. The neighbours were very surprised because they knew that she did not like Muhammad and swept the dust and rubbish over him whenever he passed.

However, they told him that she was living alone and was very ill. At once Muhammad went to her house. There he set to work, cooking a meal, fetching water from the well and sweeping the dust and rubbish. The lady was amazed to see someone helping her and even more so when she realised who it was. She was very sorry for her bad deeds and asked to be forgiven. She decided there and then to give up her bad ways and follow his examples of kindness and truthfulness.

Couples to write down all the hurts they experienced during the past month, seek forgiveness from each other and. heal each other.

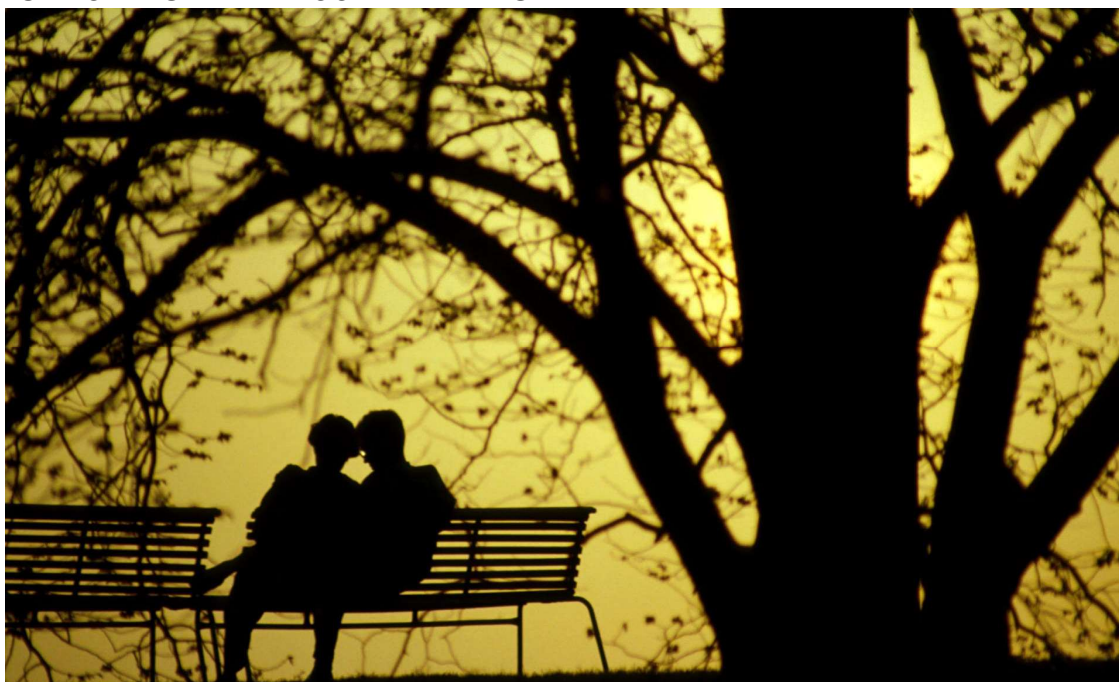
10. Use of pictures

Pictures found in magazines, newspapers, etc. provide suitable programs for Love Circles. The following are samples which you could use with your Love Circles.

10.1. User of Pictures 1 - Setting:

Take a walk in the park. You are bound to see lovers walking hand in hand, hugging each other, embracing each other. oblivious to all that is happening around them. It is good to call to memory those "good old times" that we shared with each other. We need to get away from the humdrum of everyday life and bring back that little spark now and then.

LOVE IS A WORLD THAT'S SHARE BY TWO



Questions for dialogue:

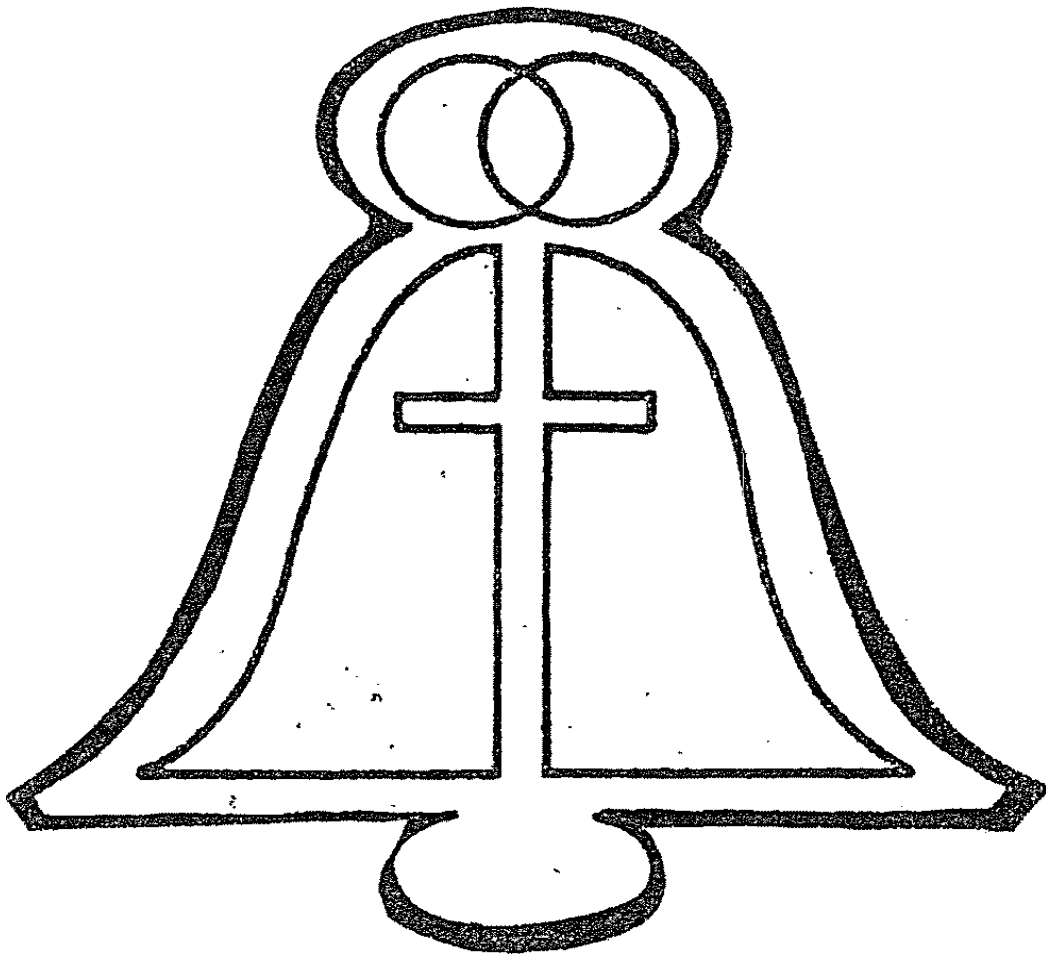
When was the last time that the two of you were able to get away from it all and to be by yourselves - free from all the encumbrances of the world? How did you feel?

10.2. User of Pictures 2 - Setting:

Very often we come across an interesting logo and we try to fathom the meaning behind it. Some artists are very creative and although their logo brings out a main theme, some hidden messages may be perceived if we take a closer look.

1989 was the 10th anniversary of Marriage Encounter in Singapore. The logo below was adopted to mark the occasion.

LOVE IS A



- 1 Share your interpretation of the LOGO.
- 2 What is it about the LOGO that is most meaningful to you?
- 3 How does your answer make you feel?

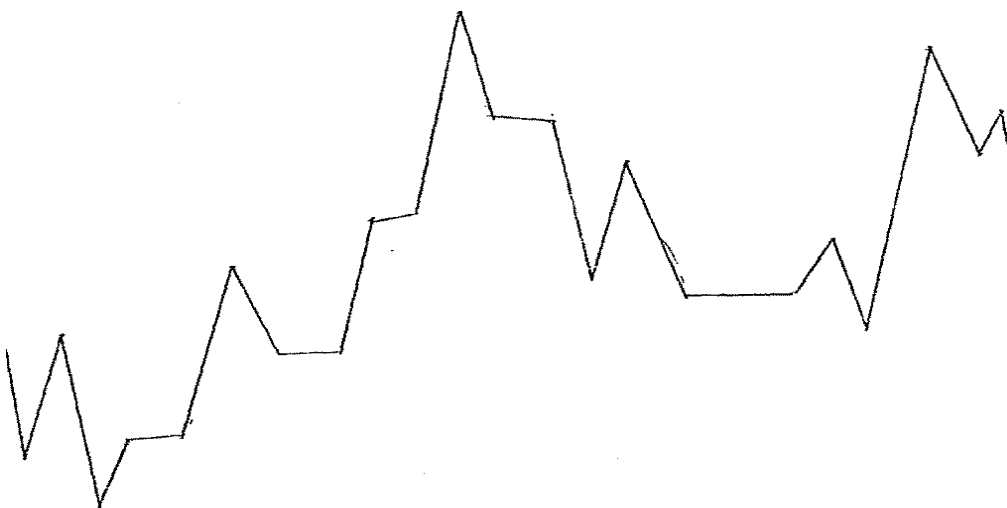
10.3. User of Pictures 3 - Setting:

When we are down, the first thing we worry about is whether we are running a temperature. And that is what the doctor is interested in when we see him. Having a temperature is serious and if it is not brought down, complications may take place.

Those interested in shares are very much concerned with the peaks and slumps in the market. And a business graph tells it all.

Sometimes, things do not seem to go right with our relationship. But do we bother to "take our temperature" to see what's wrong? "Taking the temperature" can help us locate our problems and take steps to overcome them.

Take a look at the relationship graph below and try to make something of it.



Share your understanding of this graph.

1. Share one of your "peaks" and/or one of your "depressions".
2. Which way would your journey take in the coming week Give a random forecast. What can you do to improve it?



1.8. History of Love Circles in Singapore

1.8.1. Basic Circles

When Marriage Encounter was brought to Singapore in 1979, 'Basic Circles' were designed for encountered couples who wished to continue in their relationships with God and with each other.

The idea was to bring together couples who wanted to nourish the seed that was planted on their original Weekend; to realise that we never arrived", and that we are always striving to grow closer to our spouse and to God.

At the outset, Basic Circles were meant to be formed and reformed, so that it did not become another discussion group without a purpose; a format for the evenings was drawn up to guide leaders.

In Basic Circles, it was expected that couples would take turns to host and present.

Format of a Basic Circle

The format of a Basic Circles meeting was as follows:

1. Opening Hymn & Prayer
2. Mini sharing on Homework question
3. Presentation for the evening; followed by 10/10
4. Open sharing on 10/10
5. Select question for next meeting
6. Select next Host couple and Presenting couple
7. Closing Hymn, Prayer, Refreshments, and ME News

The guidelines for hosting couple, presenting couple, and guidelines for sharing accompanied the set of instructions.

Title of Presentations

Basic Circles - Series A (before 1981)

1. Introduction to Love Circles; W.E.D.S.
2. Self-Image
3. God's Plan for our Marriage
4. Romance, Disillusionment and Joy of Dialogue
5. Prayer Life and Scripture Dialogue
6. Community

Basic Circles - Series B (before 1981)

1. Romance
2. Christian Family Living
3. Ministering
4. Possessions
5. Listening
6. Death



Basic Circles - Series C (before 1981)

1. Discovering God's Love for Me
2. Money
3. Forgiveness
4. Children
5. Time
6. Death

1.8.2. Love Circles

Improved Love Circle formats were brought to Singapore around 1982, and were offered to ME couples at the end of their "follow up" sessions, which were very similar in content to some of the above Basic Circle outlines: i.e.. Introduction to Love Circles; W.E.D.S., Self-Image, God's Plan for our Marriage, Romance, Disillusionment and Joy of Dialogue, Prayer Life and Scripture Dialogue, Community, Christian Family Living, and Listening.

Purpose of a Love Circle

The Purpose of a Love Circle was to build a loving community through a series of sharing sessions that strengthened community love and developed relationships, Trust was a central theme in these love circles.

Format of Evenings

Similar to Basic Circles, except that there was no LEAD COUPLE PRESENTATION. The evening was based on a series of open sharing on questions that were found in the leader's guide. There was a strong emphasis on special ceremonies, like Trust Walk, Meditation on Hands, AGAPE, Candle Ceremony, Pot Luck Dinners, etc.

Love Circle Programs

The initial Love Circle Programs were as follows:

1. Getting Acquainted and Trusting
2. Encounter with Self
3. Encounter with Spouse
4. Encounter with God
5. Experience of Community Love
6. Reaching out to the Community

The focus of these Love Circle Programs was based on the above six sessions, and after the sixth session, couples were strengthened enough to reach out to form new Love Circles, as explained in session 6 and session 1, where the "Getting Acquainted" part of the evening was to introduce couples from various weekends to each other and to the Love Circle idea. The other aim was to return couples to Church activities and programs where priests need assistance, e.g.. Baptism of Infants, Neighbourhood Christian Communities, RCIA sponsors, Parish Renewal, Teaching Catechism. or NFP, or just living their spousal and parental lives in God's Plan.

The outline also covered additional Love Circle Programs for circles that wished to continue together, like Faith, Forgiveness, Sex, Prayer, Communication, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Advent, Lent, etc.



1.8.3. Caring & Sharing Love Circles

These Caring & Sharing Love Circles was a more streamlined, polished version of the Love Circles described above, with essentially the same ceremonies, and quite a lot of overlap of topics. Main differences were that there were SEVEN sessions instead of six:

1. Getting Acquainted, Trust and Relationship Building
2. We, and our Relationship
3. Our Relationship with God
4. We are a Christian Community
5. Sharing of Self in Community
6. Growing in Unity
7. Reaching out in Apostolate

1.8.4. The Bridge Process

This should be called the Bridge Program, instead of the Bridge Process, because it was introduced sometime after the Love Circle formats, and it tried to tie up the post weekend "follow up" sessions, with the Basic Circle, and the Love Circle format all-in-one. The declared aim of the program was "continue the growth" "introduce community way of life" "invite them to be involved in community" .

Programs for the sessions were:

- Effects of the Weekend
- Communication
- Active or Passive Living; A Choice
- The Couple for Society
- Choosing our Values; our Responsibility

1.8.5. Where do we go from here?

Love Circles in Singapore do not seem to take to the original idea of 'forming and reforming'. Perhaps couples find it more conducive to continue with their own love circle than to form a new one. Perhaps it works better for us here in Singapore.

Most Love Circles would have experienced two standard formats - the Love Circle Format (initial program for new Love Circles) and the Caring & Sharing Format (a sequel to the Love Circle Format). Random Love Circle materials from various sources were also used.

However, couples soon ran out of materials for their love circles. Some circles developed their own materials to keep the group going. Others turned to the teams for more handouts presumably because they did not want to be 'doing the wrong thing'.

It is to this end that this handbook is prepared. Love Circle Leaders are encouraged to start off with 'tested Programs' and then to develop their own using the guidelines given. We hope you will find it useful.



2. Love Circle Program – GETTING ACQUAINTED

A. Pre Love Circle Meeting Preparation

Materials needed:

1. One large candle, to be lighted in the middle of the group.
2. Blindfolds for each couple.
3. Rules of Sharing bookmark.
4. Lyrics to 'We've Only Just Begun'

B. Opening Song (*Leader: Light a candle either before or as the song is sung. This gives a good atmosphere and symbolises that Christ is present amongst us.*)

C. Opening Prayer

D. Introduction

Leader to read as follows;

In our Love Circle, we want each person to become aware of how special each one really is, how much God loves each of us and how much each of us has to offer to others. In addition, we focus on these same attributes as they relate to each couple. We look for and describe, the Chris-like qualities that make each couple so unique and beautiful.

The purpose of a Love Circle is also to get to know each other on a feeling level and to build a spirit of trust and acceptance with each other. This leads to an appreciation of how beautiful we are as couples and individuals.

Option I : Commitment & Format of Love Circle (*if this was not done at the last bridge*)

Leader to read and lead the discussion.

We seek the commitment of the couples to meet for the initial 6 times on a monthly basis. For venue we will rotate homes among the participants.

Let's discuss on a suitable day and dates for the next 6 months. If possible to decide on whom to host which month for the next 6 months.

(Leader to lead discussion)



Option II: Rules of Sharing

Leader to read as follows:

Each love circle session is based on a program. Each session will be approximately 2 hours long. Each person/couple will be given a turn to share on a question but they may pass on any questions if they feel uncomfortable about sharing.

Listening. It is really important to listen completely to each other. Therefore we will allow each person to answer the question completely without interruption. Some questions will have a deep meaning for some people, and very personal, hence it is important not to comment or ask questions, when another is sharing. If a person has a hard time talking, we ask that you be patient and just wait until they can continue.

Confidentiality. We need to respect the confidentiality of what is being shared. No one should repeat what is said in the Love circle or discuss it with anyone. What is shared remains within the 4 walls of the room. You may tell someone of your own sharing, outside of the group. However PLEASE do not divulge anyone else's. This is so that the sharing can be open and with trust.

We would like to share with you the 6 golden rules of sharing:

- ✓ Share with your spouse before sharing with others.
- ✓ Keep your sharing short and to the point.
- ✓ Share about yourself, and not about your spouse or others
- ✓ When someone is sharing, listen quietly and don't ask questions, make suggestions or pass any comments.
- ✓ Sharing is voluntary. You may pass if you don't want to share, but remember that sharing is a special gift you can give to others.
- ✓ Sharing is confidential. Don't repeat what you've heard.

E. Activity I – Getting Acquainted

Leader conduct the activity

(Open sharing) This is a get-to-know-you activity. We would like to invite everyone to share the following questions. *(Rotate the questions so that each person has a chance to share)*

- Introduce self, where you are born, size of family, when married, when encountered
- What is your favourite activity and why?
- What is your favourite time of the day and why?
- What is your favourite time of the year and why?



F. Activity II – Trust Walk

Introduction

Leader reads: Each of you will take turn to be blindfolded, and be led on a 'trust walk'. You will also have an opportunity to lead.

Activity Instructions

- *Blindfold half the Love Circle (men or women)*
- *Select an unknown leader for each person.*
- *No talking is allowed during the entire walk*
- *Unknown leader take each person around the house, guiding them carefully for 4-5 minutes. Lead persons inside and out (weather permitting). Have them sit down, feel objects, climb stairs, shake hands, hugs, etc.*
- *After the timer signals, bring the person back and have someone else remove the blindfold.*
- *Make no mention of who led whom.*
- *Switch roles. The leaders become blindfolded and the lead become leaders.*
- *Don't reveal who led who until all have completed the walk.*

Activity Sharing

Everyone to share the following questions:

- Guess who led you. Describe their characteristics and how he/she led you
- Share who you led. How did you feel? How did the person respond?
- Did you find it more difficult to trust another or to have another place his/her trust in you?
- Share how you felt on
 - the Friday night of your weekend
 - the Sunday night of your weekend
 - how do you feel starting this Love Circle

Dialogue Question

Leader reads:

What does trusting you, my spouse, mean to me? HDMAMMF?

This is a private dialogue. Write for 10 mins and Verbal dialogue for 10 mins. There will be no group sharing.

Leader rings a bell at the end of the 1st 10 mins to signal end of writing and at the end of the 2nd 10 mins to call the couples back to the Circle.



G. Homework – Kris Kringle

Leader reads:

Until the next love circle, make your spouse feel especially loved by being his/her 'Kris Kringle'. Kris Kringle is Dutch for Santa Clause. Be a Kris Kringle for your spouse by giving small gifts, love letters, notes, phone calls, whatsapp, etc.

Please bring some of your Kris Kringles to share with the group at the next Love Circle meeting.

H. Closing Prayer

Invite a volunteer to say a closing prayer.

I. Closing song

Play 'We've Only Just Begun'

J. Attachment

J.1. "We've Only Just Begun" Lyrics



"We've Only Just Begun"

By The Carpenters

We've only just begun to live
White lace and promises
A kiss for luck and we're on our way
We've only begun

Before the rising sun we fly
So many roads to choose
We start out walking and learn to run
And yes, we've just begun

Sharing horizons that are new to us
Watching the signs along the way
Talking it over just the two of us
Working together day to day
Together

And when the evening comes we smile
So much of life ahead
We'll find a place where there's room to grow
And yes, We've just begun



3. Love Circle Program – SPOUSE

A. Opening Song – select by host from the ME song book

B. Opening Prayer

Father, help me learn to trust my spouse with all my heart.
Help me learn to speak freely of my inner longings and needs,
And to listen tenderly when my spouse speaks to me.
Help us to find time for each other, to make a place for each other in our lives.
Help us Father to be one – one in each other, and one in you,
Until you bring us both safely back to you – AMEN.

C. Introduction

Optional – If you did Kris Kringle for your last LC meet, share them with the group.

Leader to read the following:

Tonight, the program is on spouse. We will focus on our relationship with our spouse.
We strive to strengthen our couple relationship and to understand what we each
contribute to our relationship.

D. Activity – Mediation on Hands

Leader to read text on Mediation on Hands. Create a conducive atmosphere with soft music and aromatherapy fragrances in the room. (**Suggest Pachelbel's Canon in D or any suitable soothing relaxing music**) - Read the passage slowly and clearly. (**Time the music to end when you finish reading the text. About 2 mins**)

At the end of the reading, share on the following questions.

- (1) How do I feel hearing that my spouse's hands were the hands of Jesus?
- (2) What is your spouse's most Christ-like quality?

E. Sharing Questions – 10/10

Read 1 Cor Chap 13 verse 4 to 7

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous. It is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interest, it is not quick tempered, it does not brood injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoings but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believe all things, hopes all things, endures all things.



Dialogue Question:-

How does my love for you measure up to this passage?

How does my answer make me feel? (HDMAMMF)

F. Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, you well know the sacrifices, problems and hopes which come to all who embrace married life. Give us the grace and love for one another and unite our hearts in unselfish harmony so that, mindful of the needs and wishes of each other, we can live a devoted life serving you by our faithful care for the family which you have given us. Grant us patience that we may help each other to serve and love you here on earth. May we never violate our pledge of love and fidelity. May we accomplish your will in all things so that we may deserve to enjoy together in heaven, the happiness of eternity with you. Amen.



4. Love Circle Program - SELF

A. Opening Song [suggested to sing "Reflection"]

B. Opening Prayer

Most Holy Spirit, come amongst us and assist us to delve into our hearts to bring our real self to the fore. Give us the encourage to be opened and be vulnerable to you so as to be guided and in turn we can be opened to this Love Circle to re-discover our true inner selves and be the best we can be.

C. Introduction

Leader to read the following

The program for tonight is SELF. For this evening, we are sharing our self at the deeper level. This is the most necessary evening of the Love Circle since it cements the bond of love between us and in particular, with our spouse.

D. Activity – Getting to Know You

Would each person please select three items from purse, wallet or pocket that are:

- Valuable
- Worthless
- Sentimental

Once the items have been selected, share with everyone why you have picked them.

E. Sharing Questions

Please write the answers in the dialogue book the following questions (5 mins):

1. How do you see yourself and how do you think others see you?
2. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be and why?
3. Describe what you would like your life to be like in five years
4. Who is/was the most significant person in your life (outside of parents or spouse) and why?

Share with the group your answers.

To conclude the exercise Leader to read the following

By sharing "who we are," "where we came from", and "what we like," we can establish a basis for a really getting to know each other.



F. Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for having brought us together this evening
As we become aware of your presence
Help us as we strive to become better and more loving persons you created us to be.
We are weak but with your help all is possible
We thank you Lord

Arrange next meeting

G. Closing Song



5. Love Circle Program - GOD

The purpose of the session is to develop and share our relationship with God. By this session, the group sharing has relaxed people and a feeling of trust has occurred. *This* session encourages sharing about feelings and attitudes about God that they have held for a long time.

Sensitivity to differences in religious views is important to be observed in selecting questions or topics. As with the other sessions, about seven or eight questions will fill a session.

A Prayer

B Introduction

Lead couple sets the program for the evening. Explain that God is a central part of our lives - our relationships, our joys and our sorrows. Try to set couples at ease about sharing their feelings on the theme.

C Sharing Questions

Ask couples to read through all the questions listed and pick **ONLY** one to share your feelings with the group.

1. Share the most joyful moment in your marriage and how you feel that God is close to you?
2. Share your most sorrowful moment
3. Share a time when you felt God's presence within you
4. What am I afraid God is going to ask me next?
5. Where are you in your relationship with God right now?
6. How could you make your relationship with God closer and more personal?
7. If you had the power to give or do one thing for the world, what would it be?
8. If you could ask one thing from God for yourself what would it be?

D Activity

Draw names of another couple to Kris Kringle for the next session. Use your imagination - small gifts, flowers, letters, cards, plants, one-ringers, posters, Mass, coupons redeemable for baby-sitting, etc.



E Song

Either play an audio recording or a youtube video of the song ***I don't know him - from the musical Jesus Christ Superstar*** and share the lyrics of the song with the couples present.

Invite them to listen to the song and reflect on the words. No sharing is necessary.

F Closing Prayer



6. Love Circle Program – COMMUNITY

The purpose is to prepare to experience first-hand what it means to truly love others in the name of Christ. In addition, this session helps us to learn how the community loves us.

Start the meeting with a prayer for your Marriage Encounter Community. You will see that the first Christian communities were based on the love of God and each other. That same spirit of love can become a tangible experience today if we are willing to live for others. We live in a world where it is easier to give than to receive. Our real growth may come in unconditionally accepting the love of the community for us.

A. Prayer

B. Introduction

Lead couple introduces program of the evening

- 1 Guess your "special couple" (activity from last Circle)
- 2 Reveal "special couple"
- 3 Giving Game - As a couple use your billfold, purse, etc. to find a token to symbolise the real gift you would like to give each couple in the Love Circle (examples - a watch to symbolise all the good times shared, a blank check to represent trust, a house key to indicate an open home, etc.) Separate from the other couples to select items, then walk around the circle as a couple giving each couple your gift and explaining what it represents.
- 4 Read Acts 2:42-47.
If you had been living in Jerusalem during this period, the thing that would have impressed you the most about the budding Christian community described in this passage was... (note: Caution the couples to avoid interpreting the passage, but to get to their feelings)
- 5 Do you think such a Christian Community could exist today? Why or why not?

C. Sharing Questions

- 1 Share an experience of when you felt the love and caring of a Christian community
- 2 What do I feel I have to offer a Christian community?

D. Activity

Draw names of another person. Without revealing the name, describe the person's qualities and specialness. After everyone has had a turn, then reveal the name you had.

E. Dialogue

HDIF when another couple reaches out to us?



F. Closing Prayer

G. Closing Song – Suggest People by Barbara Streisand

H. Optional Questions

1. The most Christian community that I have experienced was
2. What are the qualities of the daily Christian communities that impress you the most?
3. Read Jn 13: 1-5
Imagine Jesus stepping into our group right now and ministering to each of us. How would Jesus minister to you right now? What is your deepest need at this moment?
4. Read Mk 2: 1-12
How did the four men see the paralysed man?
5. If you had a need as the paralysed man, could you call on four friends? Why do you think you could or could not?



7. Love Circle Program - REACHING OUT

This is an evening to focus on our strengths as a couple and a community and to reach out to others sharing our love

A. Prayer

B. Introduction - Lead couple sets the program for the evening

C. Sharing Questions

1. What do you think you as a couple can offer a Christian community?
2. You (the other couples) are my gift from God. Share your thoughts and feelings on this.
3. How have all of you contributed to my life during our Love Circles?
4. What part do you think God has played in our Love Circles?

D. Activity

Darken the room. Place a lighted candle in the middle of the group. Have enough candles so that each couple has one. Explain the analogy between the candle and love.

A candle is analogous to Christ, the light of the world Christ is love. As a candle dispels darkness, so does love illumine someone's life. As a candle gives warmth, so does love. As a candle gives a sense of direction, draws people together, so does love. As a candle burns, the wax melting on a candle in a way disfigures the candle, so also a love relationship involves the risk, the element of pain. A candle in order to fulfil itself: must expend itself - burn itself out. If it is never lit, it is never fulfilled, and its purpose for being is very empty. So too, love must totally give of itself for the other.

Each couple lights their candle from the centre candle. Indicate how God's love can be smothered by covering the light, but we must let it shine and not hide it under a basket.

Read Mt 5: 14-16.

Now the entire room is lit - ceilings, walls, and faces - but the centre candle, God's light, is as strong as ever. How many other candles are waiting to be lit?



E. Dialogue

What special qualities can we as a couple bring to the Christian Community? HDMAMMF?

Before the final prayer, the lead couple may want to ask couples to complete a short questionnaire to determine how each couple feels about the Love Circle up to this point and you may want to ask for suggestions for programs or activities for future Love circles, and for other suggestions to make the experience more meaningful

F. Closing Prayer

G. Song - Follow Me - John Denver

H. Optional Questions

- 1 What have you gained from this Love Circle?
- 2 What is your greatest strength?
- 3 What is your greatest weakness?



8. Additional Love Circle Program - PRAYER

A. Opening

B. Opening Prayer

C. Introduction

Tonight, the theme is Prayer. Throughout the scriptures, we find Jesus teaching people to pray. We would like to share one of these times with you. The reading is from Matt 6: 5-7.

⁵ 'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward.

⁶ But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

⁷ 'In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard.'

As we begin this evening, let's all join in praying the words God taught us. As we pray, let's try to be conscious of what the words are really saying. (Repeat in unison the Lord's Prayer)

Sharing Question

We would like each of you to focus for a couple of minutes on what prayer is or means to you, then to share your thoughts with the group during our sharing question: **What does prayer mean to me?**

1. Why Do We Pray?

We have heard of the many forms that prayer can take. Regardless of what form we choose to use, all are pleasing to God. An even more important question than the form we use is: "Why do we pray?"

This next part of the session gives us all the reasons to pray. Listen carefully and see if they apply to you. (*Leader to invite someone to read the passage below*)

Reading from "YOU" by Mark Link

I pray because I am a man and
to do what a man must do, I need strength

I pray because there is much confusion in my life and to know what



is right, I need light

I pray because I have doubt and
to keep growing in my faith, I need help

I pray because I must make decisions
but the choices are not always clear,
so I need guidance

I pray because most of what I have has been given to me and I ought
to give thanks

I pray because Jesus prayed to his Father and
if He considered it important, so do I

Sharing Questions

These questions are prepared on why we pray. Take a few minutes to reflect on the questions and write your answers in the dialogue book. (10 minutes)

Share your answers with the group.

- 1 When do I find it the easiest to pray?
- 2 When do I find it hardest to pray?
- 3 If I could choose to be in one place to talk with God, where would it be?
- 4 Prayer is an important part of my life because....
- 5 I make time to pray when...
- 6 The time of my life when prayer was most important was...
- 7 The last time God answered my prayers was...

D. Activity

Write a special couple prayer in your own words, in relation to what you would like to pray for. Write one prayer for yourselves and another for a couple in the group (*Leader may want each couple to draw the names of the other couples the prayer is meant for beforehand*).

After you have finished writing your prayers:

- Share the prayer you wrote for yourselves with everyone
- Put the prayer you wrote for the other couple in an envelope and write their names on the envelope. Drop it in a box without telling who the couple you are praying for is. All couples to take their own letters back home to read before they leave for the evening.



You may wish to use the A.C.T.S model to help you in writing your prayers. *(Leader may want to get the couples in the group to read the paragraphs below out loud before starting the activity).*

A.C.T.S. is an acronym representing a powerful model of prayer: adoration, confessions, thanksgiving, and supplication (intercession).

ADORATION:

Begin the prayer by adoring God. Praise and worship HIM. This is a time for telling God what He means to you and how much you love Him. This is not the same as Thanksgiving where you thank God for all He has done, but a time to tell God how magnificent/holy/glorious He is, to focus solely on Him, to tell Him all the wondrous beautiful things about Him you love. King David was a great worshipper of God and a man God Himself stated was after His own heart, read Psalms for great examples of adoration. (Psalm 8: O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth, who hast set Thy glory above the heavens! Heb 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess his name.)

CONFESSION:

This is when we confess our all our sins to God. Unconfessed sin creates a barrier between you and God and can hinder your prayers. Begin by confessing your sin to Him with an apologetic and repentant heart (to repent is to stop and turn 180 degrees from). Ask God to bring to mind any sins you may not be aware of so that you may repent and confess. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness I John 1:8-9. Often times the feeling of a weight lifting will follow this step. Important: Nothing can separate you from the love of God. But we can separate ourselves from the love of God just as Adam and Eve ran and hid from the Presence of God after their sin in the Garden-Notice God called after them, He did not wait for them to come to Him.

THANKSGIVING:

This is where we count our blessings, thanking and praising God for all He has given us and done for us in life. You may begin with the basics such as family, friends, food, shelter, safety, jobs, health, healing. Thank Him for hearing your prayers and for forgiving your sins, for His all-consuming love for you. Thank Him for His promises, for the glory of His handiwork, for His promises to you (if you don't know them, start looking them up). Follow Paul's advice, Ephesians 5:20 ..giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



SUPPLICATION:

This is also known as Intercession. This is the phase of prayer where we come to the Father asking God to supply needs for ourselves and others. Be specific in your prayers. For example, instead of asking for God to bless your family, ask Him to help your son focus in math class and to give his teacher the wisdom she needs to present the information in a way he can digest, etc. If you feel led to pray for a certain person but don't know exactly what that person needs, ask God to lead you in prayer. He will.

Remember, prayer is an act of communing with God. It is about communication. It is about relationship with the Father. Use these steps to help you obtain that but don't feel you must adhere to any rigid rules. Also, don't forget that communication is a two way street, that means you have to listen as well. You may not hear at first but with practice you begin to feel God speaking to your heart.

E. Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Presence with us this evening.

As we continue our journey as a married couple, we ask that You guide and help us make prayer become an important and integral part of our marriage and our relationship as a couple with You.

We ask this in Your Most Holy Name,

Amen



9. Additional Love Circle Program - VALENTINE

A. Pre Love Circle Meeting Preparation

Before the next meeting, the host should prepare coloured paper to fold paper hearts per the instructions attached. Provide pens (multiple colours if possible) for members to write love notes.

B. Opening Song

C. Opening Prayer (1 min)

Leader: As we begin this evening, let us all join hands with our spouse and commit ourselves to the following prayer of love:

All: We pray oh dear Lord, for patience and kindness, respect and charity and most of all, for enduring love and understanding for the one person you have entrusted us to love the most, and for the rest of our lives - my beloved husband/wife, [name].

D. Activity (~ 15 mins)

Leader: February is the month of valentines, hearts, cupid, and most of all, LOVE. We would like each of you to take the hands of your husband or wife... that special person who makes love come alive for you... to close your eyes, and think about how much his/her love means to you. Try to concentrate on those special qualities of your spouse. We will take 3 mins for this activity.

Share with your spouse what those special qualities are. (2min)

Share with the group what those special qualities are. (1 min per person)

E. Love Poems (you may choose to do all Poems or just selected ones)

Love Poem 1 (2mins)

Leader: Each couple will together, slowly and gently (almost whispering), read a stanza of the following poem. Passages from the Scripture or other inspirational pieces could also be used. (We recommend playing some romantic background music to accompany the reading.)



"I Love You" Author unknown

I love you.
I love you in so many ways
for so many reasons
I love the way you smile
the sound of your laughter...
The way you move your hands to make a point...
The way you speak in a voice
that is uniquely your own

I love the parts of you that are childlike:
your curiosity, your enthusiasm
and sense of wonder
I love the look of you ...
and the way you look at life

You accept life as a wonderful gift
and you try to live it
as a real person in the world
where being phony is commonplace

I love you in the happy times
when you make our joys so much the greater...
and in the sad times
when you remind me how to laugh again

I love your wisdom
that is beyond your years...
your patience and understanding
that help me separate me nonsense
from the meaning of my dreams
I love your constancy
in a world where changes
seem to come too fast...
and I love the sweet surprise of you
appearing when I need you most...
bringing me the present of yourself

I love the way you've shown me
what love is really all about...



I love you for being you...
and for encouraging me to be me

I love you for all the things you are...
and for all the things I love because of you

I love you in so many ways ...
for so many reasons...
and I will always love you

Spontaneous Sharing Question (1 to 2 mins each person)

Describe one time in the last year when you felt especially loved by your spouse.

Love Poem 2 (OPTIONAL) (2 mins)

Leader: We have heard so many ways of expressing love to one another. We would like to share with you a special reading on love.

(As before, you may choose to play soft, romantic, background music as each couple will together, slowly and gently (almost whispering), read a stanza.)

"Lovescapes" Author unknown

Every time a man and woman meet
and start to fall in love a new lovescape is begun...
a new landscape of the heart

Every lovescape is unique...
with its own hills of happiness
its own valleys of uncertainty
And every lovescape is the same...
winding through love's now, then, and yet-to-be...
for all are as one when there is love

Lovescapes are those memories of joy
of shared dreams, and the same wonder.
You may agree that the discovery of lovescapes
is worth the searching
For if love lasts
that is the most one can ask of life



And even if the dream is never realised
you will have looked with love...
you will have journeyed in joy. "

No Sharing Question.

Love Poem 3 (OPTIONAL) (2 mins)

Leader: Couple love is a special kind of love... it is the romantic, intimate sharing of oneself with our lover. But love encompasses more than this. Love isn't love until we give it away. As you listen to the following words, think about the ways your couple love has made a difference in the world and the ways your love can make a difference in the future.

(As before, you may choose to play soft, romantic, background music as each couple will together, slowly and gently (almost whispering), read a stanza.)

Collection of inspirational quotes from Wilfred A. Peterson

Love is the creative fire
The inspiration
that keeps the torch of progress aflame

Love is the dynamic motivation
behind every worthy purpose
It is the upward thrust
that lifts men to the heights

Love is the Dove of Peace
the spirit of brotherhood
It is tenderness and compassion
forgiveness and tolerance

Love is the supreme good
it is the overflowing life
The giving of ourselves
to noble ends and causes

Love is down to earth
and it reaches to the highest star
It is the valley of humility
and the mountain top of ecstasy



Love is the perfect antidote
that floods the mind
to wash away hatred,
jealousy, resentment, anxiety, and fear

Love in the words of the Master
is the shining commandment "Love One Another..."
The art of love is God at work through you.

Spontaneous Sharing Question (1 to 2 mins each person)

If we could give a special gift of love to someone now, to whom would we give, and what would it be?

F. Activity – making Valentines (15 mins)

Think of who you would like to make a valentine for. Use instruction in the attachments to fold the paper hearts. If you have more creative ideas on making valentines, go ahead and teach everyone how. On each of the hearts, write a message of love to someone special in your life. Give this heart to them the next time to see them. You can make as many as time permits.

G. Dialogue Question (10/10)

Leader: The art of love is God at work through you. We would like to share with you a Scripture reading from 1 John 4 describing God's special love for us and his call to us to love one another. After the Scripture, we will have our dialogue question. (Read vs 7-21)

DQ: How does our coupleness reflect God's love? HDMAMMF?

Sharing of dialogue question.

H. Closing Prayer

Leader: We will pray this closing prayer holding the hands of our spouses.

ALL: We pray to you O God, in the name of Jesus, your dear and beloved son, that you bless us as a couple through our sacramental matrimonial journey.

We seek your strength and your tenacity through the difficult times, we seek your understanding and forgiveness through the trying times, and most of all, we seek your blessings even as we



experience pain and suffering in the process of forging our love for each other to withstand the tides of time, to be enduring and everlasting as you have willed our love to be.

We thank you our dear Lord, for guiding and loving us throughout our marriage and especially for the moments of joy and happiness that we enjoy by your grace, and by your grace only, and for all the times that we feel so richly blessed by your gentle and loving hand as we grow in intimacy with each other.

All these we pray in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I. Attachments

I.1. Attachment 1 : Making Paper Hearts

Attachment : Making Paper Hearts

How to Make a Paper Heart

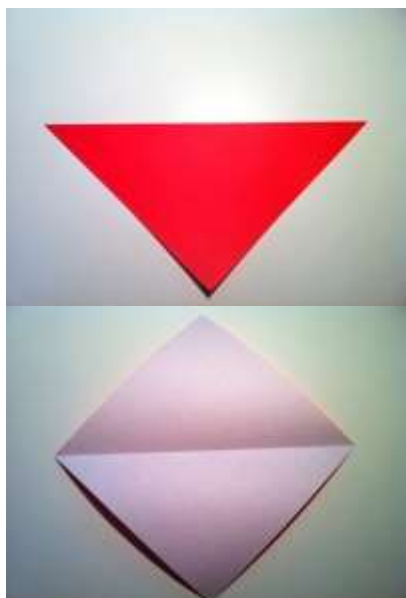


Follow the instructions below to make this Paper Heart

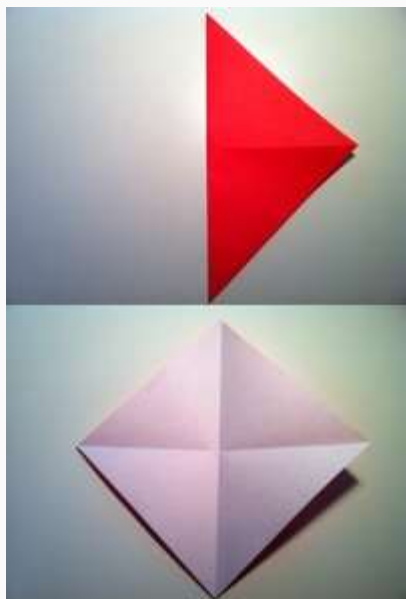
Difficulty level : Easy



Step 1: Start with a square piece of [origami paper](#) with white side up. If you only have regular 8.5x11 paper, follow these instructions to [make it into a square sheet](#).



Step 2: Fold the paper in half by folding the top corner to the bottom corner, then unfold.



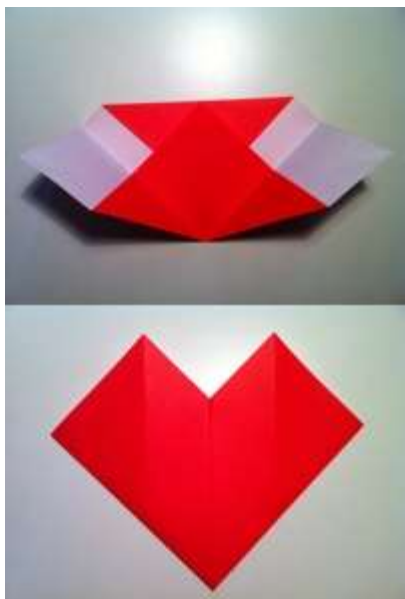
Step 3: Fold the left corner to the right corner, then unfold.



Step 4: Fold the top corner to the center.



Step 5: Fold the bottom corner to the top edge.



Step 6: Fold the bottom left and right edges to the center crease.



Step 7: Fold the top and side corners back. Now you know how to make a paper heart.



10. Additional Love Circle Program - ADVENT

A. Pre Love Circle Meeting Preparation

Before the next meeting, LC leader to;

- *Ask couples to bring their children along to join in the next Love Circle Meeting.*
- *Prepare an Advent wreath that will be given to another couple at the meeting. This wreath can be a simple home made one (made together with the children) or a simple coloured version of the picture at the end of this handout.*
- *Assign (or drawing lots at a prior meeting) who each couple will be exchanging their Advent Wreaths.*

B. Opening Song

C. Opening Prayer (It-may be good to invite children to help with the prayer)

D. Activity

D.1. Introduction

Leader to read the following

Advent, which comes from the Latin word for "arrival" or "coming," is a period of preparation for the birth of our Lord. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and is the start of the Christmas season, which lasts through the Baptism of Our Lord.

Advent is also a time of waiting. It is a time of preparation to meet the Lord. It is the season that celebrates the victory of the Power of Light over the forces of darkness. It is a time of faith. We believe that the Lord has come, is coming and will come again. This is a living faith that directs our whole life toward God.

D.2. Activity - Waiting

Items needed for the activity

- *1 medium bowl of water*
- *12 – 15 Marbles/pebbles*
- *A small prize*



Instructions for the activity

- *The lead couple should have a medium bowl, partially filled with water and a number of small pebbles, stones, or marbles. Remember, keep the actual number a secret. Remind everyone, particularly the smaller children to keep their eyes closed, to be especially quiet, and to listen very carefully for the splash. Keeping count can be like a game. A small prize may be offered to the one coming closest to actual number dropped into the bowl.*
- *Drop the stones into the water at scattered and uneven intervals. We suggest using 12-15 pebbles and making the exercise last at least three minutes. The scattered intervals, uneven splashes, and waiting time of concentrating will add a bit of suspense to the activity. You may also want to experiment ahead of time to see what works best for you as to pebble size, and type of bowl.*

Leader to read the following

Waiting... what a difficult thing for many of us to do. Yet this is what God calls us to do during Advent. Not idle waiting, however, but a period of preparation for the coming of Christ. To set the mood of waiting, we ask each of you to close your eyes, to blot from your minds the other things of the world.

We want you to concentrate on waiting and on preparing yourselves for the events of tonight. At intervals, we will drop into the bowl of water some small stones. At the end, we will ask each family how many stones were dropped. Let's see who can concentrate the hardest and guess how many stones were dropped.

Leader conduct the activity

Open sharing - Some questions to guide in the sharing.

- How did you feel when your eyes were closed?
- What were you thinking of while the pebbles were being dropped?
- What are you waiting for with respect to Advent?
- Are you waiting for anything with respect to your marriage?
- Are there any preparations you need to do in anticipation of what you hope to get at the end of this wait?

D.3. Activity - Explanation of Advent Wreath

Items needed for the activity

- *Picture of Advent Wreath – (can use the one at the end of this document) OR*
- *An actual wreath.*
- *Light up the candles around the wreath*



Each couple to read a paragraph or two of the following

During Advent we prepare for the coming of Christ's Kingdom. As Christians, we have many beautiful Advent customs and traditions. None is more beautiful though than the Advent wreath because with this wreath, families are drawn together in their preparation for Christmas.

The custom of having an Advent wreath in the home is German in origin. However, the actual origins are uncertain. There is evidence of pre-Christian Germanic peoples using wreathes with lit candles during the cold and dark December days as a sign of hope in the future warm and extended-sunlight days of Spring. By the middle ages, the Christians adapted this tradition and used Advent wreathes as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. After all, Christ is “the Light that came into the world” to dispel the darkness of sin and to radiate the truth and love of God (cf. John 3:19-21).

The symbolism of the Advent wreath is beautiful. The circular wreath represents the eternal nature of God and the everlasting life found in Christ. The use of **evergreens** reminds us of our eternal life with Christ. The pointy **holly leaves and berries** represents the crown of thorns from the Passion of Jesus and his Precious Blood; and **pine cones** symbolize Christ's Resurrection

Altogether, the wreath of evergreens depicts the immortality of our soul and the new, everlasting life promised to us through Christ, the eternal Word of the Father, who entered our world becoming true man and who was victorious over sin and death through His own passion, death, and resurrection.

The wreath holds four equally spaced candles. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. A tradition is that each week represents one thousand years, to sum to the 4,000 years from Adam and Eve until the Birth of the Saviour.

Three candles are purple and one is rose. The purple candles in particular symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete (Latin for Rejoice) Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over and they are close to Christmas.

The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of His second coming to judge the living and the dead. The light again signifies Christ, the Light of the world. Some modern day adaptations include a white candle placed in the middle of the wreath, which represents Christ and is lit on Christmas Eve. Another tradition is to replace the three purple and one rose candles with four white candles, which will be lit throughout Christmas season.



Traditionally, each of the four Advent candles have a deeper meaning. They are

- The 1st Sunday of Advent symbolizes **Hope** with the “Prophet’s Candle” reminding us that Jesus is coming.
- The 2nd Sunday of Advent symbolizes **Faith** with the “Bethlehem Candle” reminding us of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem.
- The 3rd Sunday of Advent symbolizes **Joy** with the “Shepherd’s Candle” reminding us of the Joy the world experienced at the coming birth of Jesus.
- The 4th Sunday of Advent symbolizes **Peace** with the “Angel’s Candle” reminding us of the message of the angels: “Peace on Earth, Goodwill Toward Men.”

D.4. Activity – Exchange of Advent Wreath

Take out the Christmas wreath that was prepared (if none was prepared beforehand, now would be a good time to assemble or colour one together.

Host to bless all the wreaths with the following prayer

O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen

All Light the 1st candle and a couple (or child) says the following prayer

O Lord, stir up your might, we beg thee, and come. That by your protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by your deliverance. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen

All Light the 2nd candle and a couple (or child) says the following prayer

O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for you only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve you with pure minds. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen

All Light the 3rd candle and a couple (or child) says the following prayer

O Lord, we beg you, incline your ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of your visitation. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen



All Light the 4th candle and a couple (or child) says the following prayer

O Lord, stir up your power, we pray, and come; and with great might help us. That with the help of your grace, your merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen

Exchange of wreaths

Leader to conduct the following

Beginning with <name of family> we ask each family in turn now to take your wreath and present it to the family (whose name you drew last time). As this is being done, let's all join in singing "O Come All Ye Faithful".

Leader to read the following

Advent is a time to stir-up our faith in the Lord, the wreath and its prayers provide us a way to augment this special preparation for Christmas. Moreover, this good tradition helps us to remain vigilant in our homes and not lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas

Leader conduct the activity

Open sharing - Some questions to guide in the sharing.

- How did you feel about the activity? Was there anything that touched you?
- Has this helped you prepare better for Christmas?
- What would you like to do as a family to prepare for Christmas?

D.5. A Christmas Story (Optional)

The Advent Season presents us with both temptation and a graced opportunity. The temptation is to prepare for Christmas as the world does, concentrating on the materialistic aspect of Christmas and its place in our own little world. The grace we are offered in Advent is to prepare for the coming of Christ, to journey with the church toward the stable in Bethlehem and all it symbolises. In doing so, we must reach out beyond ourselves to the larger community and in the process share with our families a heritage whose value cannot be measured in money or other materialist value.

Leader to read the following

Let us all take turns to read aloud a special Christmas story that has an important message in it for all of us. The title of this story is: "The Littlest Angel" by Charles Tazewell (see page 5)



Family Dialogue

As we see in this story, it doesn't matter whether we are young or old, rich or poor, all of us have something which can be given to the Christ Child. Advent is a time for preparing our gift so that on Christmas we will be able to rejoice and celebrate the birthday of Christ. We ask each family to find a quiet corner now and talk about what each one of you would like to do during Advent to prepare for the coming of Christ, and perhaps too, what you would like to do as a family. Please gather back here when you hear the bell.

Note: We have found an open family discussion more meaningful than attempting to write and dialogue in the more traditional ten and ten. This is due to the ages of some of the smaller children who may not be able to write.

Open sharing

E. Closing Prayer

Let us bow our heads in prayer as we ask God's blessing upon these wreaths, made and given with love to our special family.

Oh God by whose word all things are made holy, pour forth your blessing upon these wreaths and grant that we who use them during this Advent Season, may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

May we who are gathered here tonight be ever mindful of the needs of one another, our families and friends and of those who most need our love and may we be true witnesses of our faith in your coming.

We ask this in Christ our Lord. Amen.

F. Attachments

- A.1. **Story – The Littlest Angel**
- A.2. **Colouring sheet – Advent Wreath**



The Littlest Angel

By Charles Tazewell

Once upon a time—oh, many, many years ago as time is calculated by men—but only which was Yesterday in the Celestial Calendar of Heaven—there was, in Paradise, a most miserable, thoroughly unhappy, and utterly dejected cherub who was known throughout Heaven as The Littlest Angel.

He was exactly four years, six months, five days, seven hours and forty-two minutes of age when he presented himself to the venerable Gate-Keeper and waited for admittance to the Glorious Kingdom of God.

Standing defiantly, he tried to pretend that he wasn't at all impressed by such Unearthly Splendor, and that he wasn't at all afraid. But his lower lip trembled, and a tear disgraced him by making a new furrow down his already tear-streaked face—coming to a precipitous halt at the very tip of his small freckled nose.

But that wasn't all. While the kindly Gate-Keeper was entering the name in his great Book, the Littlest Angel, having left home as usual without a handkerchief, endeavored to hide the tell-tale evidence by snuffing. A most unangelic sound which so unnerved the good Gate-Keeper that he did something he had never done before in all Eternity. He blotted the page!

From that moment on, the Heavenly Peace was never quite the same, and the Littlest Angel soon became the despair of all the Heavenly Host. His shrill, ear-splitting whistle resounded at all hours through the Golden Streets. It startled the Patriarch Prophets and disturbed their meditations. Yes, and on top of that, he inevitably and vociferously sang off-key at the singing practice of the Heavenly Choir, spoiling its ethereal effect.

And, being so small that it seemed to take him twice as long as anyone else to get to nightly prayers, the Littlest Angel always arrived late, and knocked everyone's wings askew as he darted into his place.

Although his behavior might have been overlooked, his appearance was even worse. It was first whispered among the Seraphim and Cherubim, and then said aloud among the Angels and Archangels, that he didn't even look like an angel!

And they were quite correct. He didn't. His halo was permanently tarnished where he held onto it with one hot little hand when he ran, and he was always running. Even when he stood very still, it never behaved as a halo should. It was always slipping down over his right eye.

Or over his left eye.

Or else, just for pure meanness, slipping off the back of his head and rolling away down some Golden Street just so he'd have to chase after it.

Yes, and his wings were neither useful nor ornamental. All paradise held its breath when the Littlest Angel perched himself like a sparrow on the very edge of a cloud and prepared to take off. He would teeter this way—and that way—but, after much coaxing and a few false



starts, he would shut both of his eyes, hold his freckled nose, count up to three hundred and three and then hurl himself slowly into space!

However, owing to the fact that he forgot to move his wings, the Littlest Angel always fell head over halo!

It was also reported that whenever he was nervous, which was most of the time, he bit his wing-tips!

Now anyone can easily understand why the Littlest Angel would sooner or later have to be disciplined. And so, on an Eternal Day of an Eternal Month in the Year Eternal, he was directed to present his small self before the Angel of the Peace.

The Littlest Angel combed his hair, dusted his wings and donned an almost clean garment, and then, with a heavy heart, trudged his way to the place of judgment.

He tried to postpone the ordeal by pausing a few moments to read the long list of new arrivals, although all Heaven knew he couldn't read a word. But at last he slowly approached a doorway on which was mounted a pair of golden scales, signifying that Heavenly Justice was dispensed within. To the Littlest Angel's great surprise, he heard a merry voice inside—singing!

The Littlest Angel removed his halo and breathed upon it heavily, then polished it upon his garment, which added nothing to his already untidy appearance, and then tip-toed in.

The Singer, who was known as the Understanding Angel, looked down at the small culprit, and the Littlest Angel instantly tried to make himself invisible by the ingenious process of pulling his head into the collar of his garment, very much like a snapping turtle.

At that the singer laughed, a jolly, heartwarming sound, and said, "Oh, so you're the one who's been making Heaven so un-heavenly! Come here, Cherub, and tell me about it!"

The Littlest Angel ventured a look. First one eye. And then the other eye. Suddenly, almost before he knew it, he was perched on the lap of the Understanding Angel, and was explaining how very difficult it was for a boy who suddenly finds himself transformed into an angel. Yes, and no matter what the Archangels said, he'd only swung once. Well, twice. Oh, all right then, he'd swung three times on the Golden Gates. But that was just for something to do!

That was the whole trouble. There wasn't anything for a small angel to do. And he was very homesick. Oh, not that Paradise wasn't beautiful! But Earth was beautiful, too! Wasn't it created by God Himself? Why, there were trees to climb, and brooks to fish, and caves to play pirate chief in, the swimming hole, and sun, and rain, and dark, and dawn, and thick brown dust, so soft and warm beneath your feet.

The Understanding Angel smiled, and in his eyes shone a memory of another small boy from long ago. Then he asked the Littlest Angel what would make him most happy in Paradise. The Cherub thought for a moment, and whispered in his ear.

"There's a box. I left it under my bed back home. If only I could have that."



The Understand Angel nodded his head. “You shall have it,” he promised. And a fleet-winged Heavenly Messenger was instantly dispatched to bring the box to Paradise.

And then, in all those timeless days that followed, everyone wondered at the great change in the Littlest Angel, for, among all the cherubs in God’s Kingdom, he was the most happy. His conduct and appearance were all that any angel could wish for. And it could be said, and truly said, that he flew like an angel.

Then it came to pass that Jesus, the Son of God, was to be born of Mary, of Bethlehem, of Judea. And as the Glorious tidings spread through Paradise, all the angels rejoiced and their voices were lifted to herald the Miracle of Miracles, the coming of the Christ Child.

The Angels and Archangels, the Seraphim and Cherubim, the Gate-Keeper, the Wing-maker, yes, and even the Halo-smith put aside their usual tasks to prepare their gifts for the Blessed Infant. All but the Littlest Angel. He sat himself down in the top-most step of the Golden Stairs and anxiously waited for inspiration.

What could he give that would be most acceptable to the Son of God? At one time, he dreamed of composing a hymn of adoration. But the Littlest Angel was lacking in musical talent.

Then he grew excited over writing a prayer. A prayer that would live forever in the hearts of men, because it would be the first prayer ever to be heard by the Christ Child. But the Littlest Angel was too small to read or write. “What, oh what, could a small angel give that would please the Holy Infant?”

The time of the Miracle was very close at hand when the Littlest Angel at last decided on his gift. Then on the Day of Days, he proudly brought it from its hiding place behind a cloud, and humbly placed it before the Throne of God. It was only a small, rough, unsightly box, but inside were all those wonderful things that even a Child of God would treasure!

A small, rough, unsightly box, lying among all those other glorious gifts from all the Angels of Paradise! Gifts of such radiant splendor and beauty that Heaven and all the Universe were lighted by their glory. And when the Littlest Angel saw this, he suddenly wished he might reclaim his shabby gift. It was ugly. It was worthless. If only he could hide it away from the sight of God before it was even noticed.

But it was too late! The Hand of God moved slowly over all that bright array of shining gifts, then paused, then dropped, then came to rest on the lowly gift of the Littlest Angel.

The Littlest Angel trembled as the box was opened, and there, before the Eyes of God and all His Heavenly Host, was what he offered to the Christ Child. And what was his gift to the Blessed Infant? Well, there was a butterfly with golden wings, captured one bright summer day on the hills above Jerusalem, and a sky-blue egg from a bird’s nest in the olive tree that stood to shade his mother’s kitchen door. Yes, and two white stones, found on a muddy river bank, where he and his friends had played like small brown beavers, and, at the bottom of the box, a limp, tooth-marked leather strap, once worn as a collar by his mongrel dog, who had died as he had lived, in absolute love and infinite devotion.

The Littlest Angel wept. Why had he ever thought the box was so wonderful?



Why had he dreamed that such utterly useless things would be loved by the Blessed Infant?

He turned to run and hide, but he stumbled and fell, and with a cry and clatter of halo, rolled in a ball to the very foot of the Heavenly Throne!

There was an ominous silence in the Celestial City, a silence complete and undisturbed save for the sobbing of the Littlest Angel.

Then suddenly, the Voice of God, like Divine Music, rose and swelled through Paradise.

And the Voice of God spoke, saying, “Of all the gifts of all the angels I find that this small box pleased me most. Its contents are of the Earth and of men, and My Son is born to be King of both. These are the things My Son, too, will know and love and cherish and then, regretful, will leave behind Him when His task is done. I accept this gift in the Name of the Child, Jesus, born of Mary this night in Bethlehem.”

There was a breathless pause, and then the rough box of the Littlest Angel began to glow with a bright, unearthly light, then the light became a lustrous flame, and the flame became a radiant brilliance that blinded the eyes of all the angels!

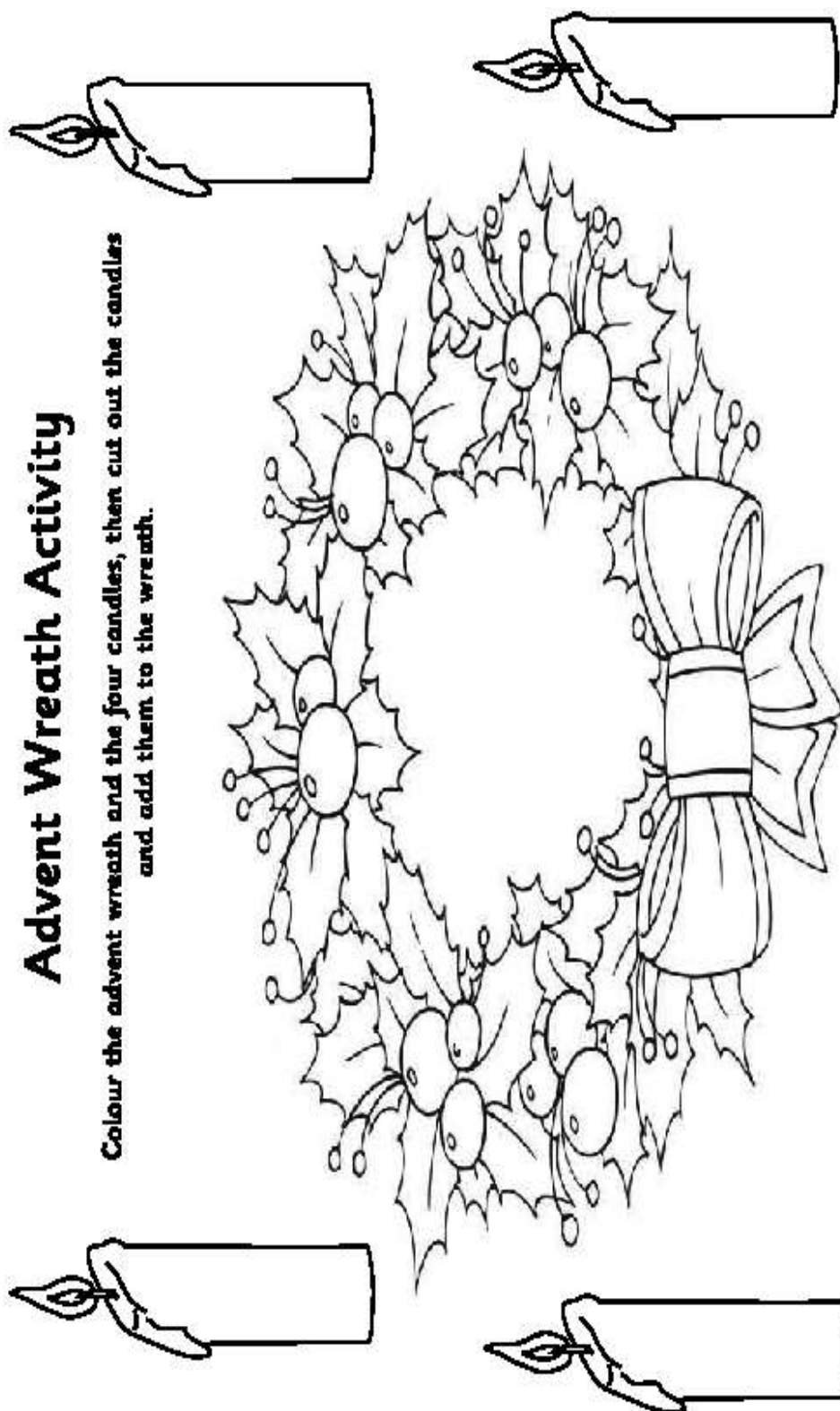
None but the Littlest Angel saw it rise from its place before the Throne of God. And he, and only he, watched it arch the firmament to stand and shed its clear, white, beckoning light over a Stable where a Child was Born.

There it shone on that Night of Miracles, and its light was reflected down the centuries deep in the heart of all mankind. Yet, earthly eyes blinded by its splendor, could never know that the lowly gift of the Littlest Angel was what men would call forever

“THE SHINING STAR OF BETHLEHEM!”

Advent Wreath Activity

Colour the advent wreath and the four candles, then cut out the candles and add them to the wreath.



www.ActivityVillage.co.uk - Keeping Kids Busy