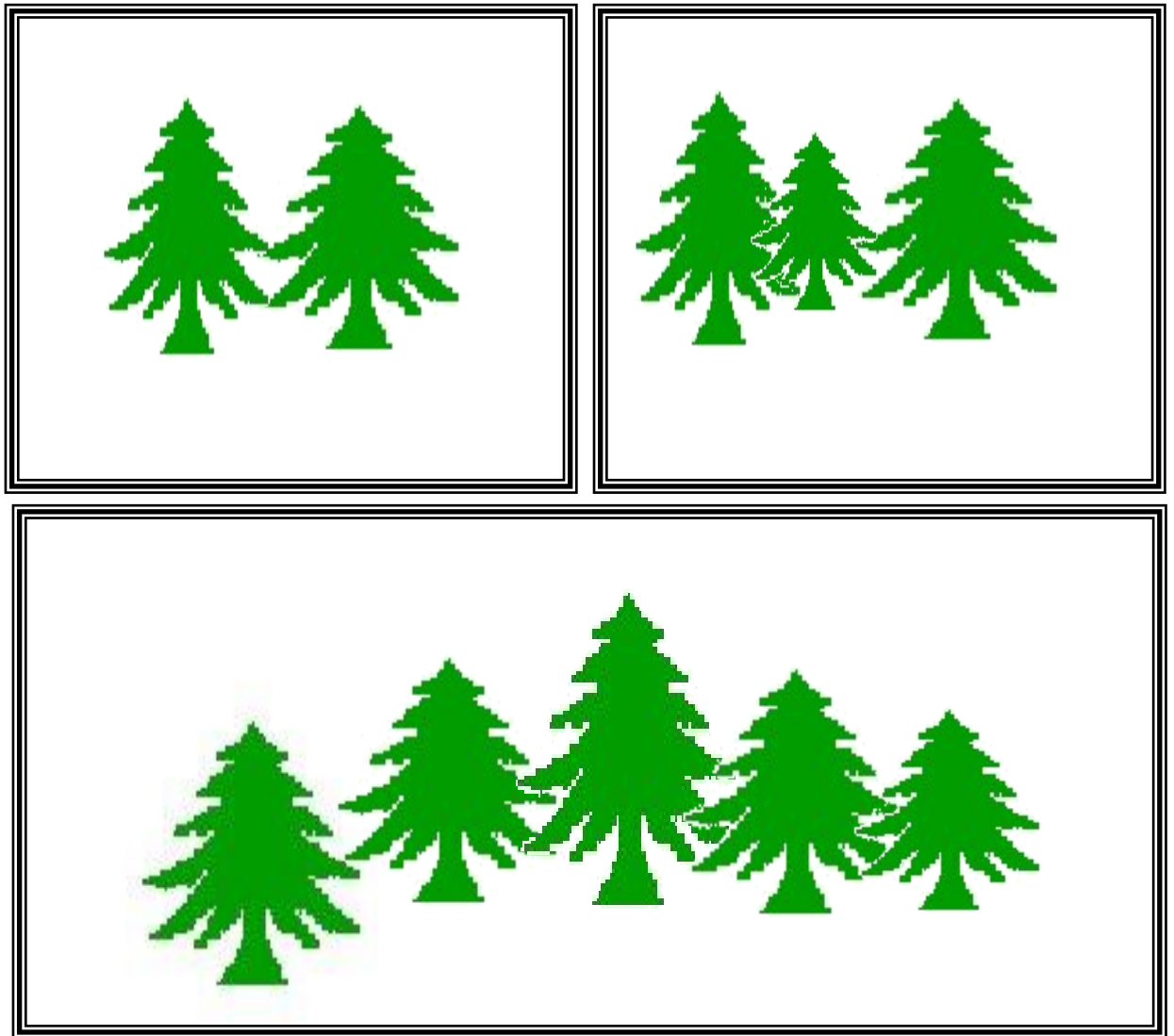


EVERGREEN

Marriage Enrichment for All Ages



John J. Colligan & Kathleen A. Colligan

EVERGREEN

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Leader's Guide

**John J. Colligan
Kathleen A. Colligan**

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Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green, In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

Forward

The Sacrament of Matrimony calls a man and a woman to become one. Oneness is not accomplished merely by wishing for it. Furthermore, it does not happen overnight—nor even in the first twenty-five years. Becoming one in mind, heart and spirit, is a lifelong process that couples are drawn to at times and deeply fear on other occasions. Total oneness is never attainable in life, but movement toward this goal is possible when there is deep love between spouses and a willingness to develop intimacy in their relationship.

The key to intimacy in marriage is good communication—both verbal and nonverbal. *Evergreen* was developed with this in mind. The authors believe that communicating on an intimate level is a skill that everyone can learn to do better.

Each session in *Evergreen* offers a few basic teachings about some aspect of the wedding vows the couples made on their wedding day. Interspersed with these ideas are exercises for the participants to fill in separately and then share with their spouses. Thus, they begin communicating immediately about their values, their ideas, their feelings, and their goals. Finally, by sharing their experiences with other couples in small groups, they learn they are not alone; there are others who are also on the journey in faith and love.

We pray each day for all married couples that God will bless their marriages and their efforts to build a great marriage. We pray especially for those who dream of what their sacrament can be and wish to live it fully. May you always know the warmth and joy of God's love for you as you grow together to our Father.



THE PROGRAM

What Is It?

Evergreen is an in-home program for married couples. Its purpose is three-fold:

1. To offer married couples an opportunity to enrich their marriages within their own parish setting.
2. For newlyweds (those married five years or less), to continue the work begun in Pre-Cana and enable couples to grow into a deeper relationship or to open new areas for discussion.
3. To build community among the couples so they can enrich and support one another both within and outside of the group.'

The framework for *Evergreen* is the wedding vows which are often spoken as a formula by the bride and groom on their wedding day without much serious thought or understanding of their meaning.

What Is the Schedule?

It is a twelve session program that calls for regular meetings of approximately two hours each. It may be offered weekly, every two weeks, monthly, or in any configuration the participant's desire.

What Is Required?

Each couple requires the *Evergreen Workbook* that contains the exercises to be done by the couple. A leader's guide is required for the facilitator(s) who will present *Evergreen*. These materials should be ordered three weeks ahead of your first meeting from:

Brown Publishing-ROA Media P.O. Box 593 Dubuque, IA.
or call toll free 1-800-922-7696.

Who Presents It?

It is preferred that *Evergreen* be presented by a married couple who are living a strong sacramental marriage, A priest, sister, brother, or widow can also be the facilitator if necessary. The leader, who does not have to write any presentations, hosts the sessions and goes through the exercises along with the couples.

Note to Those Presenting *Evergreen*

Anyone presenting the *Evergreen* program should love and care about married couples and have a strong desire to call them to a life of intimacy in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Those who are chosen to lead the program will primarily be asked to:

1. Identify a group of married couples who would be willing to gather together to enrich their marriages and socialize with other couples. The names of prospective couples could be gathered from a list of those who were married in the parish during the past five years. Even those who no longer live in the parish may be willing to return for something geared to meet their needs. Names can also be taken from those who are newly registered in the parish or from those who come for baptism of their child. As an alternative, married couples could be invited through announcements from the pulpit or in the parish bulletin. Couples could be invited privately by other parishioners who are aware of new couples moving into the area who may or may not be enrolled in the parish. Names can also be taken from the parish census cards, and you can send written invitations to those couples, asking them to participate in *Evergreen*.
2. Call the couples together on a regular basis—weekly, every two weeks, or monthly for two hours at a time.
3. Serve as hosts for the evening by setting a tone of informal warmth and friendship to everyone who comes.
4. Share the teaching content of the session by reading it aloud (directly from the Leaders' Guide), adding appropriate examples from their own lived experiences. Prior to each written exercise, the leaders should read their own written responses to the questions in order to demonstrate to the participants how the questions might be answered. There is no other preparation required of the leaders. They do *not* have to prepare a separate presentation.
5. Enable participants to share after they have finished writing their answers to each exercise. They exchange their answers and discuss them privately with their spouses. Some sessions offer periods for group discussion on the questions just answered. If no group discussion is written into a session, the leaders should invite the participants to share with the whole group what they gained from the session.
6. Encourage spiritual growth. Each session also includes Scripture to heighten the awareness of our Father's invitation to us to draw closer to Him by incorporating His Word into our lives. There is also a closing prayer included in each session. Couples are encouraged to pray together even if they are not of the same faith or no longer practice their faith. Statistics have shown that couples who marry in church and pray together each day have a three hundred

times greater chance for a lasting marriage than those who do not. It is hoped that daily prayer may eventually become part of each couple's life together.

If You Are Using *Evergreen* Alone

Evergreen has been written with the awareness that many married couples may find themselves in an isolated position, even within the parish. To do the program alone, you will need the Leaders' Guide for the teaching content. Then do the exercises in the workbook, and share with one another what you have written. While you may miss the community building aspect of the series, you can nevertheless continue to grow in intimacy with one another.

We recommend that if you are alone, you schedule a series of dates for *Evergreen* then you can have some quiet time together to relax and enjoy one another. Put the children to bed, take the phone off the hook, dim the lights and begin...

Final Note

We encourage you to use the materials creatively in whatever way they best suit the needs of your parish and of your couples. You may have small groups of two or three couples that meet in one another's homes or a large group that meets in the parish hall. You may use some sessions for large-group meetings (such as sessions one and twelve) and have the rest done in small groups. Couples who have to miss sessions can do them alone at home. Session twelve is a community celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony and may be sponsored by the group for the entire parish or used privately for their group alone.

If you wish, you may also use *Evergreen* with couples who have been married for specific lengths of time (e.g., less than five years, more than twenty years, etc.). Because the interests of older married couples are often different from those of newlyweds, it is recommended that the groups be separate except for sessions one and twelve, which are predominantly evenings of celebration.

How to Present *Evergreen*

Gathering a Crowd

The most effective way of gathering couples for *Evergreen* is to personally invite those with whom you already have a relationship. Perhaps that comes through your work with marriage preparation in the parish, or your involvement in local Marriage Encounter activities, or through blood relationships, or through close friendships with other couples who desire to grow even stronger in their sacramental love for each other. You can also go to your parish records and extend invitations to all married couples in the parish who are in the age (length of marriage) group you select, or to all those who had a child baptized in the last five years, or to the parents of the grade-school children, etc.

You should probably begin to sign up couples two months before your starting date. It has been our experience that everyone is so busy with other activities and

responsibilities that they prefer monthly meetings of *Evergreen*.

Preparation for the Leaders

The program has been developed so that you do not have to write anything in order to present the sessions. You simply go to the appropriate section of the *Evergreen* Leaders' Guide for each evening's session and read the text out loud, directly from the page. The text to be read aloud by the leaders is in bold type. There are a number of places where the leaders are advised to share their own examples of the points being made.

Prior to each exercise the leaders read out loud the directions for the exercises and then share briefly how they personally responded to the questions. That means that the leaders should do the exercises for a given session a week ahead of time in order to be prepared to share. One effective way to do this would be to work with another couple who would meet with you a week ahead of time, and go through the whole session with them, thus preparing yourselves to present *Evergreen* the following week. The other couple could also be responsible for presenting some of the sessions or leading a separate group.

It is a good idea to call each of the participating couples before each session to remind them. Perhaps that could be done during the evening you meet with your partner couple to prepare for the next session.

As you get into the program, you can also ask one of the participating couples to facilitate one of the sessions. Do this by getting together with them the week prior to the *Evergreen* meeting and lead them through the presentation just as you have been doing with your partner couple. As leaders you are NOT expected to know all the answers. You are asked to just read what is printed in the *Evergreen* Leaders' Guide and share your own experiences and personal responses to the questions. Because you are sharing your personal experiences, you are the expert on you.

The most effective parts of the sessions consist of the socializing and the sharing. In recognition of this, the length and depth of the teaching content has been kept relatively brief and simple. Each session consists of a presentation by the leader, written exercises for each participant, couple sharings—an invitation for everyone to share their response with the whole group—and a closing prayer.

Materials Needed

You will need the following supplies for each session:

- one copy of the Leaders' Guide
- pens/pencils
- name tags
- a copy of the Workbook for each couple
- a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the participants
- a calendar
- beverages/snacks

For the first session have your own wedding album handy and invite the participants to bring their wedding and honeymoon pictures with them to the

meeting. If you wish to use the Ice-Breaker game below, you will also need name tags.

Facilitating the Sessions

Greetings

Each session is scheduled for a two hour block of time. Meet each couple as they arrive with a warm greeting and ask them to write out a name tag and wear it throughout the evening.

Ice-Breaker Game

You might wish to use an Ice-Breaker game to help them get to know the other people. One such ice-breaker is to make up a set of name tags with the names of famous people, or different animals, or well-known places, and pin one on the back of each person as they arrive. Of course they don't see what is written on it. You just tell them the category you used, i.e., famous person, type of animal, etc. As they mingle, each person must ask questions to try to figure out what name is on the tag on their back.

Serve beverages and snacks at this time. Usually, this will last about a half hour, to give everyone a chance to arrive and get comfortable with one another.

Presentation

A half hour after the group arrives, ask everyone to sit down. Ask couples to sit together, because they will be discussing questions with each other. Remove the sheets for this session from each Workbook, and pass them out. Set aside the remainder of each person's Workbook in a safe place so you can distribute the appropriate sheets at each session. Be sure each person has a pen or pencil.

Begin by reading the title of the session. Then proceed to read directly from the page, the bold print material contained in the leaders' guide. Whenever you can, mention an example from your own life that demonstrates the point described.

The presentation goes well when it is shared by husband and wife, perhaps with one reading two or three paragraphs, then the other reading the next few paragraphs. There are exercises for each person in each session. Just before asking the couples to do an exercise, the leaders go through the directions for that exercise and then both husband and wife share their own responses as an example of the kind of sharing the couples are expected to do. The leaders prepare their own responses a week ahead of the session so they are ready to give them immediately before the participants begin.

Then the leaders ask each person to quietly go through the checklists and other items and mark his or her responses. Allow five to ten minutes to do this. As soon as they are ready, husband and wife share their responses with each other and discuss them. Allow five to ten minutes for couple sharing.

Then invite everyone to share with the whole group what they just shared with each

other. Because it is a sincere invitation, each person is free to respond or be quiet. However, it helps build the sense of unity in the group when people share, so urge them to do so. Be patient; wait a few minutes in silence for the sharing to begin. Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this large-group sharing and then go on with the presentation material (bold print) in the leaders' guide. Don't be concerned in the first or second session if there is little sharing with the whole group. As the months go on and they get to know one another better, the sharing will grow.

If your house or apartment is large enough, let the couples spread out while doing the exercises and call them back together for the large-group sharing. However, if you don't have space for spreading out, just ask each couple to respect the privacy of the others and to be relatively quiet in their discussion.

Planning the Next Meeting

Because everyone's schedule is subject to so many outside requirements, we have found it useful to select the precise date for the next meeting at the end of each session. Some groups might prefer to know that the sessions are always held at the same time each month. Do whatever works best for your group. At the end of the session, ask for volunteers to bring the beverages and snacks next time.

New couples are welcome to join the group at any time. Let them know that they might at first feel awkward because the group had established its identity and it will take awhile for them to adjust.

Being Flexible with the Program

The *Evergreen* program is designed to be presented over an extended period of time in order to build relationships among the couples, but you could also adapt it for a weekend experience, or choose parts of it for a one day marriage-enrichment program in the parish. Use it in whatever way best serves the needs of your parish.

Evergreen is a Catholic program that intends to study the flesh and blood meaning of living-out the traditional wedding vows in a Catholic tradition. In ecumenical marriages, we believe it is important for both partners to have this understanding because each of them has said, "I do," to the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Catholic Church. We believe both would also benefit from a similar program rooted in the faith expression of the other partner.

The major thing that happens during this program is that couples meet other couples who share their values and who are at similar stages in their lives. Over the course of the year (or more), they have the chance to build friendships that may lead them to frequent social interactions, such as attending the same Mass each Sunday, helping each other move into new apartments or houses, discussing job opportunities, discussing their family experiences, etc. It's a great thrill to go to the same Mass every Sunday and see the *EVERGREEN* couples there. It becomes a rich Church experience of a lively, supportive faith community. It also becomes an excellent means of introducing the couples to the needs of the parish so they can choose an appropriate ministry for their interests and talents.

Session One

Memories of Our Wedding Day

Purpose of This Program

This program is a series of sessions designed for marriage enrichment. The program consists of twelve two-hour sessions that can be used weekly, biweekly or monthly. Before we finish this first session we'll decide how often we want to meet.

At each session, we will look at one aspect of the vows we made to each other on our wedding day. Most couples are so nervous and excited at the moment of their vows that they say them without giving much thought to what they mean. Perhaps you remember saying these traditional vows (or something similar):

"I (your name), take you, (your spouse's name), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, for as long as we both shall live."

The sessions are designed to help you grow in love as you learn more about each other. The exercises will help you talk to one another honestly, in a way that is loving and helpful. They will also help you listen so you can better understand each other. Finally, the sessions are meant to be fun and allow time for you to socialize with other couples who share your values.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise One and shares own answers with the group.

Exercise One: Memories of Our Wedding Day (10 Minutes)

Couple Sharing

- A. Using your own wedding album as a guide, husband and wife describe their memories of their wedding day. This description should include both the positive and negative events of the day. For example, on the positive side, mention the plans that went off perfectly, the joy of seeing the whole family together, the beauty of the wedding liturgy, etc. The negative memories might include: it rained, the groom's suit didn't fit correctly, the weather was terrible, your uncle drank too much and was annoying and so forth.

As you go back over your memories, allow the person who is speaking to continue without interruption. Listen attentively to what is being said. Each of you will, no doubt, recall different things because you saw and experienced your wedding day differently. After one has finished, the other shares his or her memories of their wedding day while the first spouse listens attentively.

- B. Then go back over the day and describe your thoughts and feelings throughout the day. For example, the early morning nerves, the sentimental moments, the tears or laughter, the anger or disappointment about something. Describe as best as you can all the things that went on inside of you.

Share in the same way as before, with one going first and speaking without interruption, and the second following. Don't argue with what your spouse says. Instead listen to the response so you can learn more about this wonderful person you have married.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise One with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

There is a widely held belief that our wedding day is supposed to be the happiest day of our lives. Most of us spent a great deal of time and money to make it happy and as "perfect" as possible. Yet, even with all our effort, there are things that happen that we can't control—some are good, some are not.

The important thing is to keep the day in perspective in our memories. Bad weather is not an omen of a difficult marriage to come. The bride's tears are not a sign that she didn't want to be married. The behavior of family and friends is not a reflection on you as a couple.

God was present with you on your wedding day. In sacred Scripture we read, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). God blessed your marriage as you promised to love one another forever. He continues to bless you each day of your lives, even when you don't always feel His presence with you.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise Two and shares own answers with the group.

Exercise Two: Memories of Our Honeymoon (10 minutes)

Couple Sharing

- A. Share your honeymoon experiences, mentioning the good times as well as any times of difficulty or disappointment you may have had. The good times might include the fun of just being together to relax and enjoy life, the beauty of the place you visited, the things you did. The disappointments might include: the bride was sick the whole week, you got a terrible sunburn and couldn't bear to be touched, everything was more expensive than you thought, and so forth. Share in the same manner as the first exercise.
- B. Then share the thoughts and feelings you had during our intimate moments. The positive feelings might include: the delight in the beauty of one another, the

concern over making sexual intercourse a great experience, the hopes or fears you had for your marriage as a result. The negative feelings might include: hurt over any arguments you may have had, disappointment when you realized that you don't both enjoy the same things at the same time, frustration over little habits. Share the same way you did in Exercise One

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Two with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

Society has told us that honeymoons are to be peak moments of pleasure in our lives. Travel posters and brochures show us pictures of loving couples enjoying a day at their favorite beach or resort. For years we may have anticipated, planned, and saved for this perfect vacation together. That puts impossible pressure on the honeymoon experience to live up to our dream. The reality is that honeymoons are a mixed experience, just like the rest of life. There are good days and some that are not so good. Not everyone enjoys peak experiences of romance, sex, or understanding on their honeymoon.

Perhaps the most important thing about a honeymoon is that by going off for a few days together, you are indicating to your families and friends that you are a couple now. You are leaving behind all others in order to belong totally to each other. Your lifelong love affair as a married couple has begun.

Scheduling Next Sessions

Let's meet approximately one month from tonight. Negotiate the exact date, time, and place. Then ask for volunteers to bring refreshments.

Closing Prayer

Each session includes a closing prayer. We believe that prayer strengthens a marriage. We invite you to ask God to be the center of your home. We encourage you to pray together each day; you can use the prayer below or any one you choose. Please hold hands with your spouse while we pray together.

*May God be the center of our home
May the Father's love be in our promises
May the gentleness of Jesus be in our lives
May the Spirit's joy blow all about us
And may the Body of Christ always love and support us
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.*

Session Two

"I Take You ..."

Note: Leader may read, or ask someone else to read, aloud the following Scripture quote. .

I do not pray for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as You, Father, are in me, and I in You; I pray that they may be One in us, that the world may believe that You sent me. I have given them the glory You gave me that they may be one, as we are one—I living in them, You living in me—that their unity may be complete. So shall the world know that You sent me, and that You loved them as You loved me. (John 17:20-23)

Introduction

Jesus calls us to be one as he is one with the Father, not for our own sake, but for the sake of the world, so that people might believe in him—in his love, and his faithfulness. This is a call to all the baptized. As a vibrant model of how the baptized are to grow in their oneness, the Church looks to the Sacrament of Matrimony. Matrimonied couples who fail to work at their relationship, who fail to reach for oneness by communicating in depth, give a picture of a cold and indifferent God to the world.

The Need to Communicate

When we promise to take one another, we promise to take all of that person—body, mind, and spirit. We take one another with all the beliefs, thoughts, feelings and attitudes that each has. We take the biases, prejudices, fears, and anxieties as well as all the dreams and expectations we each have for ourselves and for us as a couple. In order to know who this unique, special individual is whom we have married and are marrying each day of our wedded life, it is necessary to communicate all these things to one another.

The next time you go out to eat, look at the other couples in the restaurant. The ones who are looking around, with little or nothing to say to one another are not on their first date, but have probably been married for some time. They have nothing to say to one another because they have let their communications fail. They are strangers to one another.

We live in a time when the communication of information is one of the technological wonders of history. But communication of persons is lagging far behind, and we are more isolated and solitary than united. The news brings us the global information so effectively, we know much more about what is happening ten thousand miles away than we do about what is going on inside the heart and spirit of our husband or wife.

Note: Read aloud the directions for part A of Exercise One) and share your answers to the exercise.

Exercise One: Topics Discussed during Past Forty-Eight Hours (8 minutes)

What Do We Talk About?

- A. List the topics you have talked about with each other in the last two days. Don't go into detail; just write down a word or two to remind yourself of the things you said to one another. As you reflect back, begin with the time you got up in the morning and go through each day. Be sure to include the little as well as the big things you might have said to one another.

Yesterday	Today
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

As soon as you finish writing, get together with your spouse to compare lists. Add to your list any topic you might have forgotten. Then proceed to part B of Exercise One, How Well Do We Rate?

Note: Encourage the couples to move on to part B as soon as they have finished discussing part A.

How Well Do We Rate?

- B. Working together with your spouse, go back over your lists and rate yourselves on the following scale:
- Put a 1 next to every item where you talked about things not related to either of you— weather, TV programs, news, jokes, and so forth.
 - Also put a 1 next to every cliché you regularly use, such as, "How was your day today?" or, "What did you do today?" These are the kinds of questions we may frequently ask each other, but often we don't really want to know the answers—especially if it means the other person is going to go into a lengthy commentary on the day.

- Put a 2 next to every time you talked about others. For example: news you might have passed on, such as "Joe and Betty are fighting again." Also put a 2 next to all the news and information about others you discussed. For example, "Maria is getting married" or John just bought a new car."
- Put a 3 down every time you talked about yourself. For example: What happened to you at work today? Or the shopping trip you went on with your mother. This might include where you went what you brought how much you spent. You may also mark a 3 for every time you talked about your children. .
- Put a 4 down every time you reached out beyond yourself and talked about something that was directly related to your husband or wife. Perhaps it was a compliment you gave him or her, or it might have been a discussion about an interest your spouse has.
- Put a 5 next to every time you talked about yourselves-your feelings toward each other, your ideas, your attitude, and your judgments – especially about your relationship with each other. Whenever you focused in on the two of you and how you're doing right now at this moment of your relationship, mark it a 5.

Then look back over the numbers; if there are a lot of 4s and 5s you are doing a good job of communicating as a couple. If you have mostly 1s, 2s, and 3s, it is a sign you need to learn more about how to communicate as a couple and practice it every day

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise One with the whole group (15 minutes).

Wrap-Up

If you find that most of your communicating has **1s or 2s**, you may be talking a great deal with each other, but you are not really communicating. You are exchanging news and information. This type of casual conversation is necessary and is an excellent way to get along with friends, co-workers, distant relatives, and strangers at a bus stop. It can establish a good working environment and help get things done, but it does not build a deep, intimate relationship between two people. For this, you need to move into the 4s and 5s.

Good Communications Build Oneness

Chances are when you were going together; you shared a great amount of intimate conversation as you talked about yourselves, your hopes, your dreams, and most especially your feelings. Then you had urgency for one another. You wanted to know all about each other. Unfortunately for most people, after they've been married awhile, they assume they already know all about one another, and there's no further need for deep sharing.

Yet we are all alive and continually changing. The feelings we have when we get up in the morning are not usually the same as those we have by dinnertime. In fact, our feelings are continually changing throughout the day as we respond to the events and people in our lives. Each of us has these feelings even though we may not be

conscious of them. Our attitudes are slower to change, yet they are continually evolving as we gain new insights and new information. Even the decisions we made a few months ago may not be the ones we would make today.

Couples who fail to communicate over long periods of time eventually experience loneliness in their marriages. It is literally true that they become strangers to one another. That's when they turn to friends or relatives to fill the gap. A husband's secretary may know more about him than his own wife. A woman's mother or sister may know more about her than her own husband. The call to oneness in the Sacrament of Matrimony is not being fulfilled.

Difficulties in Communicating

Even in a good marriage, many people find it difficult to communicate on a deep level. Communicating on this level requires a great deal of trust. It may seem strange to talk about trust between a husband and wife who love each other in a profound way. Yet the question remains, do we trust our spouse enough to totally reveal ourselves in areas that are difficult for us to talk about?

Note: Read the directions for Exercise Two and share your answers with the couples.

Exercise Two: Hot Topics (5 minutes)

Some areas are more difficult to talk about than others, usually because they're "hot topics" that bring out strong feelings. Below are listed various areas in a relationship. Put a checkmark next to the area(s) you find it most difficult to talk about with your spouse.

_____	Family/Relatives	_____	Finances
_____	Children	_____	Prayer
_____	Sex	_____	Health
_____	Time	_____	Communications
_____	Job	_____	Values
_____	Friends	_____	God
_____	Conflicts	_____	Spiritual Growth
_____	Household Chores	_____	Mutual Respect
_____	Religion	_____	House or Apartment
_____	How We Make Decisions	_____	Others (specify)

Now circle the area where you have most difficulty revealing yourself.

Which of the reasons listed below would best describe why you don't talk about a "hot topic" with your husband or wife?

- _____ Fear of being rejected.
- _____ Fear of not being listened to.
- _____ Fear I'll appear less attractive.
- _____ Fear of speaking the truth.
- _____ Hopelessness—I believe things won't change.
- _____ I don't want to "rock the boat."
- _____ Fear of revealing a weak spot.
- _____ Fear that what I say will be used against me.
- _____ Fear of being disliked.
- _____ Fear of starting an argument.
- _____ Fear of being cut off from sex.
- _____ I always lose.
- _____ My spouse holds grudges for a long time.
- _____ Other (describe)

Do you think that not talking together about your thoughts, feelings, needs and attitudes have a positive or negative effect on your marriage?

_____ Positive _____ Negative

How can you change in order to improve communications between you and your spouse?

Couple Sharing (10 Minutes)

After you finish writing meet with your spouse and discuss your responses.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Two with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Listening

One reason why most people fail to talk with one another is because they're not sure what kind of reaction they'll get from their husband or wife. All of us greatly fear rejection, especially from someone we love. In order to communicate, we need to create an atmosphere—a regular time just for the two of us—and a regular place where we can be alone. We don't need a lot of time—10 to 20 minutes a day is good, and our quiet place should be somewhere in the house where we are free of distractions.

Then we need to become a good listener as well as a good revealer. Listening isn't easy; it means setting aside whatever we're doing to focus only on our spouse. We have to look at our partner, read the body language, listen to the tone of voice, and reach out to touch one another. Listening to someone is not necessarily agreeing with what they say. Listening is attentiveness to the other and calls for generosity of spirit because sometimes it means we have to set aside something else we'd rather be doing.

Note: Read out loud the directions for Exercise Three and share your answers.

Exercise Three: Why We Don't Listen (5 minutes)

Put a checkmark next to the statements that best describe you when you're not listening to your spouse. Then go back over the list and put a checkmark next to the statements that best describe your spouse when you believe he or she is not listening to you.

Self	Spouse	
_____	_____	Indifference—I'm not interested in your thoughts, feelings, or attitudes.
_____	_____	Restlessness—I can't stand to sit and listen to you.
_____	_____	Closed Mind—I've already got an opinion, and I don't want to hear yours.
_____	_____	Busyness— I don't have time to listen to you.
_____	_____	Selfishness—I'd rather reveal myself than listen to you reveal yourself.
_____	_____	Tiredness—I'm too tired to listen to you.
_____	_____	Fear—You may tell me what I don't want to hear.
_____	_____	Anger—While you talk, I'm forming arguments in my mind. I'm not really listening.
_____	_____	It's endless—my spouse talks constantly.

How can you change to become a better listener?

How can your spouse change to listen better to you?

Couple Sharing (5 minutes)

After you finish writing, meet together with your husband or wife and share your responses.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Three with the whole group (15 minutes).

Wrap-Up

Many people think they communicate well when they don't really communicate at all. You cannot assume your husband or wife can read your mind and understand what you mean when you discuss something. You must speak clearly and carefully, and say what you mean. For example:

Some people speak in code. Teresa was willing to visit her husband's family every Sunday for two or three hours. However, she didn't want to stay for a long evening. Rather than say so directly, she continually made excuses about why they should leave his parents' house to go home. "I didn't bring enough formula for the baby." "I'm all out of clean diapers." "I have a headache." Each time she said something like this, her husband would rush to the nearest store to buy whatever it was she needed, while Teresa fumed that her husband didn't read her signals correctly. When Teresa finally told her husband that she wanted to spend less time with his parents, he easily agreed.

Some people fear being accused of nagging. Lucy was one of these. Rather than directly asking her husband to help her, she would say, "The living room needs vacuuming." Or "I think the dog needs to go out." Jim would glance up from the TV long enough to agree with what she said, but he never moved to help her. Lucy had to learn to ask Jim directly for what she wanted.

Michael had an inferiority complex about his ability to fix things around the house. Whenever his wife, Nancy, asked him to do something, he would always put it off—sometimes for years. Finally, he got up the courage to tell Nancy how inferior and inadequate he felt and how he dreaded fixing things. So now they get someone to help with the more complicated jobs or they work on things together. In fact, Nancy has more skills than Michael, but Michael has more patience. Together they make a good team.

Some people try to manipulate one another. Sam felt strongly that they should not spend a lot of money for Christmas gifts. But Gloria wanted to buy lavishly. Rather than sit down and discuss the issue with each other, Gloria said, "Don't worry about it; I'll pay for it with my own money." In this way, Gloria got her way without having to listen to Sam.

But Sam likes to play golf with his friends. Gloria doesn't mind a short game once a week, but is unhappy about the three nights of golf that is Sam's schedule. So Sam tells Gloria he will take her out to dinner in exchange for his golf games. He tells himself how gracious he is to give her this time. He believes he's a good husband, keeping the "little woman" happy; she feels used and overlooked, and she views the weekly dinner date as patronizing. Note how Sam and Gloria are not listening to one another. They need to communicate their feelings, thoughts, and inner needs to each other.

Most people marry one another because they believe they have found someone who fully understands and accepts them as they are. They have a great deal of trust in this other person. After marriage, we keep trust and love alive by honestly and openly confiding in one another everyday and fulfilling our call to become one in mind and spirit

Closing Prayer

Leader asks everyone to read the closing prayer aloud.

*Dear 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. .
Lord, help us to find time for each other everyday, 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.*

This is a good prayer to say together each day for the next month to remind us that God wants us to be one and is willing to help us work toward that goal if we let Him.



SESSION THREE

“To Have and To Hold...”

Introduction

Note: Ask one of the couples to read aloud the following Scripture passage.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:24-25)

A deep, lasting, and committed sexual relationship is a gift from God to His people. The key phrase is, they "... were both naked, yet they felt no shame." God intended that there be no shame between a husband and wife. They were to be free to delight in the physical beauty of each other. God made the bodies of men and women so they could be stimulated and aroused to experience sexual fulfillment with one another in marriage. Sexual intimacy increases and deepens the emotional bond between husband and wife, and deeply involves their entire relationship with one another.

Our Attitudes about Sex

No one comes to marriage without a whole set of attitudes and expectations about sexuality and sexual intercourse. Though most of us are unaware of it, we were trained in our attitudes from early childhood, first by our parents and how they lived out their own relationship and then by our friends. Society, in general, also influenced us along with courses we took, things we read or saw on TV or in the movies, comments we heard in the locker room jokes, and so forth.

Note: Read the directions aloud for Exercise One and share your own answers.

Exercise One: Information Sources about Sex (3 minutes)

Using the list below, check the main sources from which you developed your ideas about sex:

- _____ Talking with my parents.
- _____ Older brothers and sisters.
- _____ Friends.
- _____ Discussions with a family doctor.
- _____ Written material given you by your parents.
- _____ Magazines, sex manuals, etc.
- _____ Movies and television.
- _____ Your husband or wife.
- _____ Courses taken in school, parish, or through Planned Parenthood, Girl Scouts, etc.

What was your reaction when you learned about sex from that source?

What is your reaction now when you recall how you learned about sex from that source?

Couple Sharing

After you have finished writing, get together with your husband or wife to share your responses for about three minutes.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise One with the whole group (15 minutes)

Note: Leader reads directions for Exercise Two and shares own answers.

Exercise Two: Attitudes about Sex (10 minutes)

Go through the list below and check the attitudes you have about sex. Then go back through the list and check the attitudes you believe your husband or wife has about sex.

Self	Spouse	Attitude
_____	_____	Sex is dirty.
_____	_____	The woman risks more in sex.
_____	_____	Good sex ends in mutual climax.
_____	_____	Sex is more satisfying for a man.
_____	_____	Sex is a woman's duty.
_____	_____	A man is responsible for his wife's pleasure.
_____	_____	Sex means more to a man than to a woman
_____	_____	Sex should be spontaneous.
_____	_____	Sex should be romantic.
_____	_____	Frequent sex is important.
_____	_____	Quality is more important than quantity.
_____	_____	Sex is for having children.
_____	_____	Sex is better when you're single.
_____	_____	The man should know more about sex.
_____	_____	There's a time and place for sex.
_____	_____	The man should be the aggressor in sex.
_____	_____	We must feel close before we have sex.
_____	_____	Sex is more emotional (spiritual) for a woman.
_____	_____	Sex keeps a husband or wife faithful.
_____	_____	Husband has to change his attitudes.
_____	_____	Sex is an ego-builder for the man.
_____	_____	The woman must be in control of herself.
_____	_____	Birth control is a woman's responsibility.
_____	_____	My body belongs to me. I have a right to say no to sex.
_____	_____	Sex determines the quality of our marriage.
_____	_____	Sex is never a problem for us.

Self	Spouse	Attitude
_____	_____	My wife has to change her attitudes.
_____	_____	Men are selfish in sex.
_____	_____	The husband is responsible for having his wife reach orgasm each time
_____	_____	Other (Specify)

Which of these attitudes (your own or your spouse's) do you believe causes the greatest difficulty in your sexual relationship? Why? (Be gentle and sensitive and share in loving detail)

Couple Sharing

Exchange your responses with your spouse; read it twice and then discuss it for ten minutes.

With these attitudes in mind read the Scripture verses on the first page of this session and discuss with your spouse how well your attitudes conform with it. Share for three minutes.

Note: Leaders invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Two with the whole group (15 minutes)

Our Attitudes Influence Our Behavior

Whether we like it or not, we have assumed a Playboy Magazine mentality toward sex, at least to some degree. This mentality causes us to confuse lust with love, to separate having a baby from the act of having sex, and to compare ourselves and our sexual performance with what we imagine other people our age are doing. Because of this, we see ourselves as either spectacular successes or total failures. Our expectations for ourselves and one another may be a source of constant frustration. If we overemphasize the activity aspect of our sexual intercourse, our sexual relationship can become much less than what we would like it to be.

It's important to understand our attitudes about sex and talk about them because our attitudes greatly influence our behavior. Very often married couples don't really talk to each other about sex because they believe it is dirty or because they are embarrassed by intimacy. They may also be afraid that if they talk about it, they will reveal their own ignorance, or they may have to change, or that they will upset their spouse and make the situation even worse.

A man may feel he has to live up to a macho image—the "experienced" one, ready for sex twenty-four hours a day. He may see sex as a physical need and feel he is responsible for the success of their sex life. Therefore, he feels pressured to be great. So he finds it easier to joke about sex or not talk about it at all. He wants to keep up a strong, confident image and not even let his wife know about his fears or insecurities.

A woman might not talk about sex with her husband because she believes he couldn't possibly understand a woman's point of view or her problems. Perhaps she believes her husband is always ready and always satisfied by sex and is insensitive to her needs. She may fear offending her husband by talking with him about their sexual relationship. Both may fear rocking the boat by talking about a sensitive topic with one another.

Note: Lead couple shares what prevents you from talking more frequently about sex with your spouse. Then read the directions to Exercise Three aloud and share your answers.

Exercise Three: Evaluating Our Sex Life (5 minutes)

From the items below, choose no more than three that describe your sexual relationship when it is at its best. Then go back through the list and mark the item(s) you believe your spouse would use to describe your sexual relationship when your spouse thinks it is at its best.

Self	Spouse	
_____	_____	When we have spent an enjoyable day together.
_____	_____	When we celebrate a special occasion.
_____	_____	On a vacation.
_____	_____	Mostly on weekends.
_____	_____	When it's spontaneous.
_____	_____	When it breaks our normal routine.
_____	_____	After we have been out for the evening.
_____	_____	When you do something special to set the mood.
_____	_____	When we decide to love each other.
_____	_____	When we use it to heal one another.
_____	_____	Other (Specify)

Is our sex life all I want it to be? _____

How can / make it better? Focus on how *you* can change, not on how your spouse can change.

Couple Sharing

Now meet with your spouse and share your responses for ten minutes.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Three with the whole group (15 minutes).

Wrap-Up

By talking about the positive and negative aspects of their sexual relationship, a couple can grow both in physical as well as emotional intimacy. When they really understand one another, trust grows and with trust comes a deepening confidence in one another in all areas of their relationship.

Closing Prayer

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is our Blessed Mother, too, and she invites us to turn our lives over to her Son. Please hold hands now and recite aloud with us one of the common prayers of the Church.

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

We invite each of you to recite this prayer together daily until we meet again.



Session Four

“From This Day Forward...”

Introduction

When a couple promises to love, "... from this day forward ...," they are making a lifelong commitment to one another. Their dreams may or may not come true, and the events of their lives may be pleasant or difficult, but their love will continue to grow if they learn from their experiences, and they are willing to change. In order to achieve this, they will need to communicate on a very deep level and learn to share their feelings with one another.

Looking at Feelings

Why Feelings Are Important

We can't really know ourselves or our spouse until we understand and accept our feelings. In order to become growing persons, we must accept all of our emotional reactions. It is our emotions that most clearly define us from others and set us apart as unique individuals.

Thousands of others may share our opinions on child rearing, divorce, abortion, and the best cars to buy. Many others also experience the same experiences in their lives as we do; going on vacation, working every day, buying groceries, and so forth. A husband and wife most likely have similar opinions on many things and share common experiences. Yet the feelings they have behind their opinions or experiences are often quite different. Unless couples share their feelings as well as their ideas, opinions, and beliefs, they will not truly understand one another.

Definition of a Feeling

A feeling is a pleasurable or painful sensation within us that might be externally or internally aroused. For example, a person's car might be hit by a careless driver, and the person feels angry. On the other hand, sometimes we're not sure where a feeling comes from, such as just waking up feeling irritable.

Positive and Negative Feelings

Certain outside experiences can trigger deep feelings within us. When these feelings are good, like the feelings of peace and relaxation on a vacation, we want to enjoy them forever. When they are negative feelings, like the embarrassment of getting a lecture from the boss, we want to get away as fast as possible.

It's easy to accept the positive, joyful, and friendly feelings in ourselves and others. It's much more difficult to accept negative feelings, and we often try to hide them, even from ourselves.

We Bury Our Feelings

Many times we bury our feelings because:

1. *We Have Been Programmed to Do This.* For example, a man from a family that is constantly fighting may be comfortable expressing anger, sarcasm, or criticism but find it difficult to show love and compassion. On the other hand, a man from a family that values peace may find it difficult to express anger or hostility
2. *We Moralize Our Feelings.* We label certain feelings as good or bad. For example, we say, "It's good to feel grateful but bad to feel jealous." Almost everyone dislikes jealousy or self-pity, yet they are feelings we all experience at one time or another.
3. *We Reject Feelings That Conflict with Our Image of Ourselves.* For example, if a man believes a real man never shows fear, then he's not likely to admit to fear in himself. He'll either try to suppress fear and talk himself out of it, or he'll give it a different name by saying, "I feel tense," or "I feel worried." Rather than accept the fear within him and work through it, he may avoid fear producing situations altogether.

A woman who believes that the modern woman is strong and independent may be unable to acknowledge a lack of self-confidence or feelings of inadequacy. She'll try to suppress them, perhaps blaming others for situations that trigger these feelings in her. She'll like herself best when she feels on top of the world, and dislike herself when she feels weak or vulnerable.

Note: Leaders share why they might bury their feelings and when they are most likely to do it.

Sharing Feelings

A married couple cannot really know each other unless they share their feelings. When they fail to communicate feelings, they will eventually begin to experience loneliness and isolation in their relationship. In general, women are more likely to share feelings than men—probably because in our society women are still allowed to express their feelings more openly. Men are expected to control their feelings. But as more and more women climb the corporate ladder to success, they feel compelled to behave like men and control their feelings in public. Sometimes we become so used to controlling our feelings that we begin to deny them, even to ourselves.

When couples fail to communicate their feelings on a deep level, they begin to see their spouse as a stranger, not as an intimate friend. They know they don't always have the same feelings and they don't share the same experiences each day, but deep down each wants to be understood and accepted by the other. When they don't share their feelings, they don't really know the other person. Then differences become magnified and soon become a threat to their marriage.

Identifying Feelings

Let's begin with some fundamentals. When we can make a sentence sound sensible by saying, "I feel...", followed by one word, we can be fairly sure we have identified a feeling as distinct from an opinion, judgment, or idea. For example, "I feel curious." Or, "I feel delighted."

When we begin a statement with, "I feel that...," we are almost always expressing a judgment or opinion. For example, "I feel that the weather is great today." Or, "I feel that you need to change."

When we can substitute the words "I am" for "I feel" and the statement still makes sense, we have indeed identified a feeling. It makes sense to restate, "I feel curious," as "I am curious." It does not make sense to restate, "I feel that you need to change," as "I am that you need to change."

Note: Go through Exercise One with the couples, taking them along step by step.

Exercise One: Sorting Out Feelings from Judgments (2 minutes)

In the space below, fill in the sentence that begins, "I am....."

I am _____

Now fill in the sentence that begins, "I feel...." Just add one word (for example. "I feel enthusiastic." "I feel bored." "I feel tense")

I feel _____

You have just identified a feeling in both sentences. When you can substitute the words, "I am" for the words, "I feel" you have named a feeling.

Wrap Up

The distinction between feelings, thoughts, and judgments is important because feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just are. We can argue about opinions, and judgments, but we can't argue about feelings—our own or our spouse's.

More Insights about Feelings

1. *The Morality of Feelings.* Feelings in themselves have no moral value. There is a morality connected with our actions, but not with our feelings. For example, a man can feel angry at another driver who suddenly pulls his car in front of him. That is neither right nor wrong. But if he gets out of his car and punches the other driver, this angry action could be judged as being wrong. Another example is that a woman can feel irritable before her morning coffee. If she abuses everyone in the house because she's irritable, that may be sinful behavior. It is the behavior that has a morality connected with it, not the feeling.

Some people allow their behavior to be dictated by their feelings and feel free to take them out on others. There are women who are angry with men, and they take their anger out on most of the men they meet, especially on the men who are close to them. There are men who live out their feelings of hostility or revenge on others. Some people dwell in self-pity, others in jealousy. If you find yourself living with chronic negative feelings, acknowledge them and work to overcome them. Our feelings do come through, even when we try to suppress them. You may not be the type of person who hits others, yells, or argues frequently, but you may withdraw into coldness or indifference. As married couples, we have a responsibility to our spouse to seek healing for chronic negative feelings.

2. *Blaming Others for Feelings.* We also can't blame our feelings on others. No one else is responsible for our emotional reactions. Married couples tend to blame their feelings on their husband's or wife's actions. They make statements, such

as "You make me angry," or "You frighten me." Another person can only stimulate emotions that are already within us.

We may be disappointed or upset by something our spouse did, but that's because of the expectations we had. When we blame others for our feelings, we don't learn anything about ourselves or why we behave the way we do. For example, if a man can blame his wife for making him angry, he doesn't have to look inside himself to find out why he reacted that way. He can simply pin the problem on her and walk away in self-righteousness, believing he's right—she's wrong. He concludes he doesn't have to change; she does. So he remains ignorant about himself and his wife.

On the other hand, if he accepts the fact that his wife is only stimulating certain feelings that are already in him, each encounter becomes a learning experience for him. He can ask himself, "Why do I get so angry when she asks me to take out the garbage?" "Why am I so irritated if she doesn't want to fix dinner? Perhaps he feels used in their relationship or has expectation about how a wife ought to behave. They need to sit down and talk about these underlying attitudes to clear the air of any misunderstanding.

Some people feel trapped in marriage and blame it on their spouse. They should be asking themselves why they feel this way. "What is going on inside of me that cause me to feel this way?" "How can I change so we can have a happier marriage?"

Note Leaders share an area in which they used to blame their spouse for their feelings and how they stopped doing that Then read through the directions for Exercise Two and share your own responses.

Exercise Two: Common Feelings (12 minutes)

Go down the list of feeling words in Exercise Two and check off those you have experienced most frequently in the last forty-eight hours.

<input type="checkbox"/> Angry	<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritable	<input type="checkbox"/> Critical
<input type="checkbox"/> Furious	<input type="checkbox"/> Helpless	<input type="checkbox"/> Bitter	<input type="checkbox"/> Resentful
<input type="checkbox"/> Hostile	<input type="checkbox"/> Happy	<input type="checkbox"/> Vindictive	<input type="checkbox"/> Jealous
<input type="checkbox"/> Sony	<input type="checkbox"/> Depressed	<input type="checkbox"/> Alienated	<input type="checkbox"/> Joyful
<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn	<input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed	<input type="checkbox"/> Bored	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopeless
<input type="checkbox"/> Empty	<input type="checkbox"/> Excited	<input type="checkbox"/> Tired	<input type="checkbox"/> Insecure
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic	<input type="checkbox"/> Weak	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong
<input type="checkbox"/> Hesitant	<input type="checkbox"/> Adventuresome	<input type="checkbox"/> Bold	<input type="checkbox"/> Eager
<input type="checkbox"/> Gentle	<input type="checkbox"/> Passionate	<input type="checkbox"/> Tender	<input type="checkbox"/> Close

Then choose the strongest feeling and write a description of it so your husband or wife can understand what it felt like. (For example, "I was so angry I thought I would explode like a kernel of popcorn just as it pops and flies out of the pan." Or, "I felt frightened, like the time you were driving the car and it went out of control.")

How did you express this feeling—either in your words or in your actions? (For example, "I didn't let anyone at work know how angry I was -I was afraid I'd lose my job. So I held my anger in as best I could. I withdrew from everyone and was quiet for the rest of the day, even after I came home. That night, I stuffed myself with food and drank a six-pack of beer, watched TV and ignored you." Or, "When I was angry about how I was treated at work, I came home and dumped all over you, I felt used at work, so when I came home, I wasn't about to put up with your request for help with the housework. I figured that I had had enough for one day. So I told you off after dinner.")

Write how you expressed your feelings in words and/or actions:

In order to help yourself grow in your relationship with your husband or wife, evaluate your behaviour. Was this a positive or negative way to express your feelings? Did it help or hurt your relationship?

_____	Positive	_____	negative
_____	helped our relationship	_____	hurt our relationship
_____	had no effect	_____	other (specify)

If the way you expressed your feelings hurt your relationship, how can you do better in the future? Write how you can behave differently.

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

After you finish writing, meet with your spouse, exchange and share your responses.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to the Exercise Two with the whole group (15 mins)

Wrap-Up

Because we live in such intimate contact with one another, married couples often take out their feelings of frustration, tiredness, boredom, and so forth, on one another. When we do this, we are hurting an innocent party—the one who loves us most in this world and whom we have promised to love forever. By sharing feelings, accepting our own and each other's feelings, and by not blaming each other for our feelings, we can learn to live in deep love and peace. Each of us might be very different from the one we chose to marry. We cannot live each other's lives nor spend every moment together, but we can know and understand what it's like to be that other person and walk in that person's shoes.

As people look within themselves to understand their feelings, they become growing people, better able to relate to their spouse and knowing where and how they need to change in order to have a happier marriage. It is also true that when we are in touch with our feelings, we have more control of them. When we can put a name on how we're feeling, we have power over it. By sharing that feeling with our husband or wife, we bring it out into daylight and can begin to handle it.

Closing Prayer

When the disciples and holy women asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he recited the perfect prayer to the Father as recorded in Scripture.

Note: Ask one of the couples to read the following Scripture passage:

This is how you are to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us the wrong we have done as we forgive those who wrong us. Subject us not to the trial but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:9-13)

Please hold hands with your spouse and recite aloud the Our Father in the words we use today:

Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver it's from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory now and forever. Amen."

We invite you to recite this prayer aloud together each day until we meet again.



Session Five

"... For Better"

Introduction

When a couple promises to love one another "...for better," they usually only think of all the delights in store for them when they marry. Most people marry because they believe they will have a better life after marriage than before. They are hopeful that life from then on will be richer and more fulfilling—life will be better for them.

The Benefits of Marriage

There are many different ways to look at the benefits of marriage. Some count the practical gains such as:

- Sharing a combined income.
- Leaving behind undesirable roommates.
- Availability of a better car to use.
- Having a nicer place to live.
- Freedom to decorate in one's own taste.

Even when economic gains are not obvious, there is still the belief that life will somehow be better. Even a simple house or apartment is dreamed of as a love nest. The car they have may be old and junkie, but it will be theirs to share. Most of all, life will be blessed because they will be together all the time. From now on, they will be united as a couple.

Some of the gains they may have from this are:

1. Freedom

- a. To make their own decisions about their lives.
- b. To spend their money as they please.
- c. To eat what they want, when they want.
- d. To do as they please.
- e. To live together with society's approval.

2. Independence

- a. From families.
- b. From old values and traditions,
- c. To live wherever they choose.

3. Status

- a. As a married couple, they have some status in society they may not have had before.
- b. They are to be taken seriously as adults.
- c. They are recognized as a family unit.

Note: Leaders share briefly a few of the benefits they hoped to gain from marriage before they were married.

In addition to the preceding improved quality of life factors, we can also look at "For Better...." as relating to how each of us becomes a better person through living out our marriage.

Becoming Better People

Ultimately, the greatest gains from a marriage come from the changes that occur within the couple themselves. The love of a spouse draws forth from them qualities they frequently didn't even know were present within them, such as a strong nurturing instinct or great tenderness. They literally become better people because they have married one another.

Note: Leaders go over the directions for Exercise One and share their own answers.

Exercise One: Becoming A Better Person (5 minutes)

How have you become a better person since you married your beloved? Put your initial next to those qualities that have grown in you-at least to some extent-since you married.

Then go back through the list and put your spouse's initial next to those beautiful qualities you see in him or her since you married. In one or two words, mention when you have seen your spouse displaying that quality. (For example, you might have checked peacefulness as a quality you've seen in your spouse. You notice this in the evening when you look into your spouse's eyes. So you'd write down the words "Evening-in your eyes." You might have also have noticed kindness with a neighbor; so you'd check "Kindness" and add "with our neighbor.")

Self	Spouse		When
_____	_____	Peacefulness	_____
_____	_____	Joy	_____
_____	_____	Generosity	_____
_____	_____	Sense of Fulfillment	_____
_____	_____	Sexual Passion	_____
_____	_____	Gentleness	_____
_____	_____	Kindness	_____
_____	_____	Thoughtfulness	_____
_____	_____	Zest for Life	_____
_____	_____	Appreciation for Nature	_____
_____	_____	Appreciation for God	_____
_____	_____	Self-confidence	_____
_____	_____	Spiritual Growth	_____
_____	_____	Desire for Children	_____
_____	_____	Sense of Being Special	_____
_____	_____	Dependable	_____
_____	_____	Openness to New Ideas, Places, Experiences	_____
_____	_____	Other (Specify)	_____

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

After writing, meet with your spouse, exchange your responses and discuss them with each other. Be sure to listen carefully to one another. Your spouse may see in you qualities you don't recognize. You might also find that some things you have counted as negative or difficult experiences (like having to live on a budget or having to prepare a meal each night) have really been positive because they have helped you become more disciplined as a person or more mature as a couple.

Note: Leaders invite everyone to share responses to Exercise One with the whole group (15 minutes)

A Measure of a Great Marriage

While we all hope to find true happiness in marriage, it is not sufficient to live out our married lives by continuously measuring what we have personally gained by it. When we look at marriage only from the point of view of, "What I am getting," we are looking at marriage selfishly. Sooner or later, we'll decide that we're not getting enough out of it. We're giving more than we're receiving. Our spouse is failing us. Whenever we begin scorekeeping in marriage, we are bound to be dissatisfied.

The measure of a great marriage is not in what we get, but what we give. Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition; it is a 100/100 proposition. Marriage is a total gift of self to one another.

Note: Leaders ask one of the couples to read the Scripture passage below.

St. Paul tells us:

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

When we evaluate our marriage, the questions to ask ourselves are: "What have I done today to love my spouse more? What can I do today to bring more joy into my spouse's life?"

Note: Leader reads directions to Exercise Two and shares own answers.

Exercise Two: Practical Definitions of Love (7 Minutes)

Go Through the list of qualities that belong to love and put a checkmark next to those qualities you believe you need to develop. Then go back over the list and mark those qualities you'd like your spouse to develop.

Self	Spouse	
_____	_____	‘Love Is Patient..’
_____	_____	I don't mind waiting for you
_____	_____	I enjoy sitting and listening to you.
_____	_____	I never nag you to change.
_____	_____	“Love Is Kind ..”
_____	_____	I enjoy cooking for you.
_____	_____	I like to help you with your work.
_____	_____	I bring you thoughtful little gifts or love notes.
_____	_____	"Love Is Not Jealous ..."
_____	_____	I am proud of your accomplishments
_____	_____	I brag about you to my friends.
_____	_____	I don't compete with you.
_____	_____	"Love Does Not Put on Airs .."
_____	_____	I don't see my values as superior to yours.
_____	_____	I put you first on my list of priorities. . .
_____	_____	I take an interest in what is important to you. ,
_____	_____	"Love Is Not Snobbish.."
_____	_____	I love your family as my own.
_____	_____	I am willing to do things that interest you.
_____	_____	I accept your friends. .
_____	_____	"Love Is Never Rude ..."
_____	_____	I am never sarcastic with you.
_____	_____	I don't tell others of your negative qualities.
_____	_____	Even when I'm angry, I am gentle with you.
_____	_____	“Love is Not self Seeking..”
_____	_____	I don't measure what I'm getting out of our relationship
_____	_____	Spending time with you is more important to me than getting ahead of my job or being with my friends
_____	_____	I enjoy waiting on you and caring for you
_____	_____	‘Love Does not Brood over Injuries..’
_____	_____	I work through our disagreements right away
_____	_____	I don't pout, slam doors, or walk away from you.
_____	_____	I find it easy to forgive you

Self	Spouse	
_____	_____	“Love Does Not Rejoice In What Is Wrong”
_____	_____	I want only good things for you
_____	_____	I don’t plot to get even with you
		When you are unhappy, I comfort you
		“Love Rejoices with the Truth”
_____	_____	I am always willing to admit I am wrong
_____	_____	I never lie to you, even when it’s ‘for your own good’
_____	_____	I like to pray with you.

Now go back through the list and put a star (*) next to the quality you would most like to develop in yourself right now

Write down how you will go about developing that quality in yourself. Why will you do?

When will you do it?

How soon will you begin?

In the past how has your spouse been most successful in helping you make a change? (encouragement, support, friendly reminders)

How can your spouse help you develop this quality now?

Couple Sharing

After writing, turn to your spouse to discuss your answers. Exchange you response, read them and share your reactions. While you’re talking, it’s important to remember that no one can force another person to change. The only person each of us can change is ourselves.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Two with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

The Sacrament of Matrimony calls us to selfless love and selfless giving of ourselves to one another. This is in direct contrast to the messages we receive from society about how we should find fulfillment by making ourselves happy first. Obviously, selfless love is not achieved overnight, but is grown into—a little at a time—throughout the lifetime of a marriage.

The fear that most couples have is that when they lose themselves in one another, they will lose their self-identity. Yet when we recall those times when we are most passionately in love with one another and most selfless, we are also most ourselves. There is a joy in us then and inner freedom. We do things we never thought we'd do simply because we're in love. This is part of the mystery Jesus speaks of when He says, *"Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* (Matthew 16:25)

Closing Prayer

Mealtimes are one time of the day when we are most likely to be together. This is an excellent time to pray together as a couple. We recommend that after you have finished saying grace before your meal, you say the following prayer, which we will recite aloud together now:

Father we pray that we will become more one with You and with each other today.

Please say this simple little prayer together at mealtimes each day until our next session.



Session Six

"...For Worse"

Introduction

When they experience marriage for worse, a couple finds that their marriage is not what they expected it to be or wanted it to be. She may think, "This isn't what I bargained for when I married him." He may wonder, "Whatever happened to the sweet girl I married?"

This is a time when most couples get frightened about their marriage. They begin to wonder, "Is this all there is to our love?" And, "Will it be like this for the rest of my life?" They are disillusioned with their marriage, and they frequently don't know what to do about it

You Are Not Alone

The first thing for the couple to understand is that they are not alone. Every marriage goes through cycles of affection and closeness as well as cycles of disappointment and frustration. Sometimes they go through those cycles rather quickly. For example, a couple may wake up in the morning feeling very good about life and each other, so they'll make love to celebrate the feeling. However, when they prepare breakfast, they may discover that they're out of coffee and the toaster isn't working right. She may recall how he puts off fixing things and the toaster has been on her repair list for months. He thinks to himself, "Why can't she remember to buy what we need when she goes after groceries?"

She concludes, "He's so thoughtless and lazy. If he really loved me, he'd fix things when I asked him to." He decides, "She's really a scatterbrain. If I don't do things myself, they won't get done at all."

By the time they leave for work, they are both in a black mood—glad to get away from each other—wondering why their marriage has to be so difficult. Most of the time, they each conclude that it wouldn't be so difficult if only their spouse would be more like themselves.

Cycles

Sometimes the cycles of affection and disappointment occur over a period of months or even years. For awhile, everything seems to be going great in a marriage; then, suddenly, it seems that everything is awful. They wonder what happened to them. Why is it so difficult? What can they do about it?

When a couple is unhappy with their marriage, they easily focus on all the negative aspects of their relationship, especially on the faults of their spouse. They may say such things as:

- "You don't listen to me."
- "You don't understand me anymore."

- "I can't take it with you anymore."
- "You're moody."
- "You're selfish."
- "You're too possessive."
- "You have bad habits."

They become critical and judgmental of one another. They forget about the goodness of their spouse, all the close times they've shared, the intimacy they've enjoyed. Sometimes they even deny that there were good times or their love was ever real or deep. They forget about how they saw each other when they were going together—all the good qualities that first attracted them to one another.

Note: Leader reads through the directions for Exercise One and shares own answers with the group.

Exercise One: The Qualities That First Attracted Me to You (3 minutes)

Go through the list below and put a checkmark next to those qualities you liked best in your spouse before you were married. Focus only on those qualities that attracted you to each other in the first place

_____ Ambitious	_____ Gentle	_____ Energetic
_____ Talented	_____ Joyful	_____ Sexy
_____ Enthusiastic	_____ Athletic	_____ Shy
_____ Intelligent	_____ Sense of Humor	_____ Sensitive
_____ Laid Back	_____ Family Centre	_____ Kind
_____ Thoughtful	_____ Skillful	_____ Friendly
_____ Hardworking	_____ Good Looking	_____ Patient
_____ Persevering	_____ Religious	_____ Handy

Couple Sharing

After you have finished, share your list with your spouse. Describe how your spouse displayed that quality before you were married, (For example, "You were so ambitious. You had two jobs." "You had a great sense of humor. You always could make me laugh.")

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise One with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Living Together Every Day

After they marry, a couple begins to experience all these great qualities on a day-in, day-out basis. They never fully appreciate what all these qualities mean until they begin to experience them in terms of living with them forever. Over the course of a lifetime together, a couple experiences both the positive and negative aspects of the same qualities. The qualities that attracted them to one another in the first place are still present. When they are upset or disappointed in one another, it is frequently because they are experiencing the negative side of the same great quality they once admired. For example, here are some qualities with their positive and negative sides.

Positive

Ambitious
Good looking
Family Centered

Thoughtful
Athletic
Friendly
Religious
Persevering
Laid Back
Energetic

Negative

Workaholic
Vain
Daddy's girl/Mama's boy (spends every Sunday with parents)
Wastes Money on Gifts for Friends
Works Out until Exhausted
Friends Come First
Holier Than Thou
Stubborn
Lazy
Always Busy

Note: Leader shares a few positive qualities in your spouse that also have a negative side in your relationship.

The persons we married are still the same wonderful people they were when we were going together. They still have the same qualities we fell in love with, but they are spending those qualities now, less on building our relationship, and more on themselves and their own interests. It is this that hurts.

Criticism

When people are hurt, they tend to become critical, and it's easy to focus on negative qualities once we begin. Matrimony gives a couple a particularly intimate view of each other, and if they choose to do so, they can quickly destroy one another with criticism and sarcasm. There are many reasons why people get divorced, but there is one thing that is common to all divorces—that is, criticism of the spouse. Criticism is never constructive.

Note: Leader reads through directions to Exercise Two and shares own answers.

Exercise Two: Recalling Criticism

Who were the people in your life who were most likely to criticize you? Put a mark next to their name:

<input type="checkbox"/> Mother	<input type="checkbox"/> Grandparent	<input type="checkbox"/> Boss
<input type="checkbox"/> Father	<input type="checkbox"/> Babysitter	<input type="checkbox"/> Friend
<input type="checkbox"/> Brother	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Sister
<input type="checkbox"/> Stepparent	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	

How did you feel when you were criticized? (Check 3)

<input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed	<input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed
<input type="checkbox"/> Angry	<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated
<input type="checkbox"/> Hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/> Loving
<input type="checkbox"/> Eager	<input type="checkbox"/> Positive
<input type="checkbox"/> Frightened	<input type="checkbox"/> Annoyed

How did the criticism cause you to feel toward the person who was criticizing you?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very positive	<input type="checkbox"/> Trusting
<input type="checkbox"/> Distant	<input type="checkbox"/> Hurt
<input type="checkbox"/> Suspicious	<input type="checkbox"/> Annoyed

How did you see yourself as a person as a result of the criticism?

<input type="checkbox"/> Good person	<input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstood
<input type="checkbox"/> Bad person	<input type="checkbox"/> Victimized
<input type="checkbox"/> Abused	<input type="checkbox"/> Taken for Granted

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

After writing, meet with your spouse and share your answers. Be sure to listen tenderly because he or she may have some difficult memories to discuss.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share responses to Exercise Two with the whole group. (15 minutes)

Criticism Hurts

When we criticize our spouses, we are making judgments about them or their behavior. Our judgments may be correct or incorrect—it doesn't matter. As judges, we have set up ourselves as their superiors, and we are handing down our decrees on them. Our spouses will always see themselves as less in our eyes when we are critical.

Criticism versus Correction

Sometimes, however, correction is necessary, and correction is different from criticism. Correction applies to actions, while criticism applies to persons. Correction is used when we notice things are off course, and they need to be changed. For

example, a husband might say, "I feel really pressured when we are always late for appointments. How can I help us get ready on time?" A wife might comment, "I'd like to spend more time with you. How would you feel about not visiting your mother every Sunday?"

In the first case, the husband is letting his wife know how he feels when they're late. He's not judging her or blaming her. By adding the last question about how he can help her, he's letting her know that he's willing to do some things differently in order to be on time. This allows his wife to tell him what it is that slows her down. It may be that she desperately needs his help with housework or in dressing their baby in order to get to places on time.

In the second case, the wife is making no comments about her in-laws. Instead, she is stating her own need for time alone with her husband. This allows him to discuss with her a different schedule for family visits without having to defend his parents or his relationship with them.

Sometimes couples criticize one another because they like to have someone to blame when things go wrong. Society teaches us that part of being an adult is to assume responsibility and, when we fail to meet our responsibilities, we are blamed and criticized for our failings. No one is perfect all the time—even when they are very sincere and try very hard—things do go wrong. The battery in the car dies, the milk gets spilled, the baby stumbles and gets injured, the washing machine overflows. Although those things are usually the responsibility of one or the other partner, they usually know they have failed. They don't need to be blamed as well. Instead, an understanding spouse can say, "Well, things happen. What can we do together to make things better?" If they both recognize that they're on the same side in things—they both want a happy marriage and a good family—they can work together to bring this about.

We can decide not to judge one another, not to blame, and not to criticize. We can also decide to love one another and change our behavior in order to please and support our spouse—not because we're so wonderful, but because God has sent us this magnificent person to love, and we are blessed to be loved by that person. When we decide to live in love, free of criticism and harsh judgments, we make room for love to grow and for real trust and confidence in our relationship to develop.

Note: Leaders share how they are eliminating, or trying to eliminate, blame and criticism in their own marriage.

How God Sees Us

Note: Leader asks one of the couples to read aloud the Scripture verses below.

*God created man in His image;
In the divine image. He created him; male and female
He created them.
God looked at everything He had made
And He found it very good. (Genesis 1:27- 31)*

We are made in God's image. He made us in His own perfection and invites us to be perfect. That doesn't mean He wants us to be just like Him; that would be impossible. Instead, He wants us to be perfectly ourselves—loving and accepting the goodness within us and within one another.

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, couples have a unique opportunity to point out the goodness they see in each other and in their children. When they praise one another, they are also praising the God who made them. Praise should be a daily part of every couple's life.

Closing Prayer

The Psalms are part of the ancient prayer of the Church and have been used throughout the ages by the people of God to express their feelings and needs to their Creator. Below is a Psalm of praise. It can be recited together or you can alternate the reading with one of you reading the first and third verses and one reading the second verse. It's a great prayer to use together at the beginning of the day.

Note: Leader asks one of the couples to read aloud this prayer-

Praise the Lord from the Heavens,
Praise Him in the heights; Praise Him, all you His angels,
Praise Him all you His hosts. Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all you shining stars.

Praise the Lord from the Earth,
You sea monsters and all depths; Fire and hail, snow and mist,
Storm winds that fulfill His word; You Mountains and all you hills,
You fruit trees and all you cedars; you wild beasts and all tame animals,
You creeping things and you winged fowl.

Let the kings of the earth and all peoples,
The princes and all the judges of the earth, Young men too, and maidens,
Old men and boys, Praise the name of the Lord,
For His name alone is exalted; His majesty is above earth and heaven;
And He has lifted up the horn of His people. (Psalm 148:1-3, 7-13)



Session Seven

"For Richer..."

Note: Leader asks one of the couples to read the Scripture verses below.

Scripture Reading

Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Men do not light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. They set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father (Matthew 5:14-16)

Introduction

The kind of marriage a couple will have and the way they'll live their lives together is a decision they are free to make. If they decide to work at their relationship, their marriage can be a rich one—rich in love, rich in intimacy, rich in joy and appreciation of one another. A rich marriage requires thoughtfulness, attentiveness, and deference to one another—putting the well-being of one's spouse ahead of self. Part of being a couple is to recognize that we are no longer alone. There are now two people to consider in every decision we make. This is why making decisions as a couple is so important.

Making Independent Decisions

From the time we were young children, we have been trained to stand on our own two feet, think for ourselves, and make our own decisions. When we began making decisions about how we would spend our time or our money, our parents may not have always approved, but they recognized that we were becoming independent people. Therefore, they allowed us to proceed. Ultimately, as adults, we made all our own decisions, and we knew we had finally achieved our freedom.

Then we got married and found that our private decisions were not always supported by our spouse. In fact, just having to turn to another person for approval on a decision can be very irritating. We may begin to regret our loss of independence. Some people continue to make their own decisions and then announce their decision to their spouse, hoping to convince him or her that it was a good idea. Often, when seeking the approval of our spouse, we find ourselves totally frustrated and angry when that person does not agree with our decision.

Many couples are frightened when they realize how different they are from one another. Some complain that they can't even make a simple decision, like what type of sofa to buy or how often to visit their parents without getting into a major argument. It's important to realize that all decisions a married couple makes affect both of them whether it's the type of coffee they will buy or the brand of toothpaste they prefer.

Note: Leaders share on a decision made early in their marriage where they disagreed with one another. It could be about some trivial incident. For example, what to eat for dinner, or where you would spend the holidays, or having friends in to visit. Show how even something minor can become a source of real hurt or conflict between you when you fail to communicate. Then invite the participants to share any similar experiences they may have had.

Wrap-Up

Ultimately, all decisions affect our relationship as a couple. If one of us constantly ignores the other in little decisions such as the kind of food we'll eat, the color to paint our bedroom, or the friends we'll see, the other person will eventually feel left out and resentful. On the other hand, the partner who makes most of the decisions may eventually feel burdened by the responsibility and develop his or her own resentment.

Some people don't want any input on their decisions. For example, a woman may decide to postpone having a child or a man may decide to take a job with more responsibility without consulting his or her spouse. Even if the spouse protests, the decision maker simply says, "That's tough." This puts a great deal of stress on a marriage.

Decision making can be complex even for an individual, and it is much more difficult for two people to make common decisions. Marriage is a total partnership in all things. Decisions made must be couple decisions even though it sometimes takes a little longer to reach a joint decision.

Note: Leader goes through the directions for Exercise One and shares own answers with the couples.

Exercise One: How Do You Make Decisions? (10 minutes)

Put a checkmark next to the statement(s) that best describes how you and your spouse reach decisions.

- _____ We each make decisions in areas where we have the most interest. (For example, she makes decisions about meal planning and decorating the apartment. He makes decisions about their car(s) and their social commitments.)
- _____ We each make decisions in the area where we have the most training or skills. (For example, she knows about religion so she attends Church for both of them. He knows about accounting, so he pays the bills.)
- _____ We generally make decisions separately, and then try to convince the other of a decision already made.
- _____ We work toward fairness in our decisions. ("If you get this much money to spend on clothing, I get the same amount" "If you spend three hours on your hobbies, I also get to have three hours to do what I want." "If you see the boys on Friday night, I can have time with the girls on Wednesday.")
- _____ One of us makes all the decisions about everything.
- _____ Other (specify)

Why Do You Postpone Decisions?

Put your initials next to those statements that best describe why you might postpone decisions. Then go back through and put your spouse's initials next to those statements that best describe why your spouse would postpone decisions.

Self	Spouse	
------	--------	--

- | | | |
|-------|-------|--|
| _____ | _____ | Don't have time. (Work to do, company coming, baby needs attention etc.) |
| _____ | _____ | Not in the mood. ("I want to be left alone." "I have other things on mind." "I'm too tired," etc.) ' |
| _____ | _____ | Not informed. ("I don't know enough about this; I can't make any decision.") |
| _____ | _____ | Fear of getting into an argument. |
| _____ | _____ | Indecisive person. (Avoids all decisions.) |
| _____ | _____ | Irresponsible person. (Doesn't really care about most decisions.) |
| _____ | _____ | Other (Specify) |

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

When you have finished, get together with your spouse and share your answers. .

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the whole group. (10-15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

If a couple feels free to communicate their ideas and expectations with one another in a friendly, non threatening way, they can usually come to terms quickly about a problem or a decision that has to be made. In an atmosphere of open communications, both feel comfortable with their decisions because they each know they have been heard.

When couples make separate decisions, they can frequently get into a power struggle about who knows best about certain things. In this way, the more domineering partner is most likely to have control of decisions. Then there is a "winner" and a "loser." But when one partner loses in a decision, both lose. Some people are very decisive and tend to make quick decisions about things. That person can force his or her spouse to a decision before that person is ready. On the other hand, a slow decision maker can use slowness to avoid making a decision.

Agreeing to Disagree

When couples make mutual decisions sincerely and regularly, they find the process itself helps clarify the issues. As each partner becomes more aware of the thoughts and feelings of the other, they often find the decision just "falls out," and they are of one mind on the issue. Or they realize that each one has legitimate, different opinions and no action should be taken at this time. In other words, for the time being, they agree to disagree and keep working toward agreement in the days and weeks ahead.

The Goals in Decision Making

The goals of couple decision making are:

- To use the skills and insights of one another to reach decisions.
- To build the level of trust, confidence, and respect the couple has for each other by working together.
- To be supportive of one another in the decisions that are made.
- To be loving and caring with each other if a decision that was made does not turn out well.

Every couple decision requires conversation, honest probing and an investigation of the facts. Often decisions are made on hearsay (what the guys at work said) or on a purely emotional basis ("I spotted that stereo system, and I just had to have it.") without any attempt to find out what the facts are.

A good question to ask in any decision is: How does this decision affect our relationship? If it builds your relationship and makes it richer, go for it. If it hurts your relationship, stop everything and reevaluate. The final question to ask is: In response to God's call to us to be a light in the world, does our decision make Him more present (or less present) to ourselves and others?

Making a Decision

In a moment, we'll offer two examples of how to reach a couple decision. For our examples we'll use the names Sam and Margaret for the husband and wife. The purpose of this exercise is to have each partner write down his or her own thoughts and feelings about the question. After that, you'll exchange your answers with each other and hopefully reach a decision.

Note: Leader tells the couples to refer to their answer sheets while listening to the following examples being read aloud. After you finish reading both of the examples, they should begin working on their own decisions in Exercise Two.

The question for example one is in the area of household chores. Many couples have difficulty deciding who will do certain household chores. Because this affects the quality of life the couple will live on a day-to-day basis, it must be discussed and settled.

Example One

The question Sam and Margaret chose was: Should Sam do the weekly grocery shopping?

Margaret Wrote

Advantages

He gets through work earlier and can do it before I get home
I really dislike going to the store
I won't have to carry in heavy bags.
I'm too tired to go at night—always have to do it on weekends.
He's faster than I am at it.

Disadvantages

He buys things I wouldn't buy
He doesn't plan the menu, I do
He's not likely to use coupons
I'll have to make out a list ahead of time

Feelings

I really don't want to do it all the time. I feel used. I would not mind doing it most of the time and sharing this responsibility with you.

Sam wrote

Advantages

A voice in what menu will be.
Possibility of controlling money spent on food.
Reduce burden on my wife
Able to carry bags better than she is

Disadvantages

Unfamiliar with supplies needed
Have other things to do around the house.
Takes too long - waste of my time.

Don't think husband should do shopping-yet I'm willing to share it. Wouldn't want to do it all the time.

Feelings

Would feel used and annoyed if had to do it all the time, but willing to do it at least some of the time or willing to do it with you.

When Sam and Margaret got together to share their responses, the decision was obvious: The best thing for them as a couple was to share the responsibility for grocery shopping. They believed God's presence would be more real to them when they could do a chore neither one enjoyed with someone they loved.

With another couple, there would have been different thoughts and feelings discussed, and it might be obvious to them that one or the other should do the shopping. Still others might realize that this was a very difficult issue for them, and they might have to postpone making a decision for awhile.

The second example is a more personal question in an area couples often find difficult to discuss with one another.

Example Two

The question for decision is: Should Margaret invites Sam to have sex with her more often than she does now?

Margaret Wrote

Advantages

We can make love when I want it and really feel like it
It will give me a chance to show my love for you
It will make our relationship stronger

Disadvantages

I'm uncomfortable initiating sex
I don't always have sex on my mind. Sometimes it's the farthest thing from my mind
If we waited for me to initiate sex every time, we wouldn't have sex as often as we do now

Feelings

Mostly awkward and uncomfortable - I don't see myself as very sexy. I am willing to initiate sex some of the time, however, because I love you very much. There are times when I do want to make love with you and you don't ask. I think it would be good for both of us for me to invite you to make love.

Sam Wrote

Advantages

It would indicate that you also care for our sexual relationship.
Would build my self-image
You would know for sure whether this was a fertile part of your cycle.
We would make love more often.

Disadvantages

Loss of control of this area of our relationship
I might not feel like it
I might not be able to respond

Feelings

Excited and eager overall - after Sam and Margaret exchanged answers, they realized Sam would really like it if Margaret initiated sex more often, and she is willing to do it. Therefore, Margaret should initiate sex more frequently, and Sam should encourage her. They believed that frequent lovemaking would help their love to grow, and they could be a greater sign of God's love to others.

Note: Go over the directions to part A of Exercise Two. After all the couples have chosen their questions, read the directions for part B. Then share your own answers to parts A and B.

Exercise Two: Making Your Own Decision

Part A

Go through the following list and put a checkmark next to the question(s) you would like to discuss with your spouse. (For the purposes of this exercise, we are using questions about household chores. Any other question can be used if you prefer.)

When you write your thoughts and feelings, write your own, don't address the question as a philosophical discussion about whether all men and all women should do something.

- _____ Should the husband buy groceries?
- _____ Should the wife pay the bills?
- _____ Should the husband prepare the meals?
- _____ Should the wife take out the garbage?
- _____ Should the husband do the laundry?
- _____ Should the wife take care of car maintenance?
- _____ Should the husband do general housecleaning?
- _____ Should the wife mow the lawn?
- _____ Should... (add your own question)?

Couple Sharing

Now get-together with your spouse, compare your answers, and choose one question you will discuss. Choose the question with which you both have the strongest feelings

PART B

Write the question below. Insert your own name where it says husband or wife (e.g. The question "Should the husband prepare the meals?" will now read "Should Bill prepare the meals?")

The Question is

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

FEELINGS

COUPLE SHARING

Now get together with your spouse, exchange what you have written, read it twice, and discuss. Then answer the following questions.

What decision have you reached?

How will this decision affect your relationship?

Does this decision draw us closer to God or farther away from Him?

Couple Sharing

Discuss your response to these last three questions with each other.

Note: Leader invites everyone so share their responses with the whole group. (10-15 minutes)

Closing Prayer

Join together now and say this prayer aloud, and say it together as a couple each day until our next session.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going
I do not see the road ahead of me,
I cannot know for certain where it will end
Nor do I really know myself,
And the fact that I think that I am following
Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so
But I believe that the desire to please You
Does in fact please You.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

(The Road Ahead, by Thomas Merton)



Session Eight

“... For Poorer”

Introduction

When people think of loving each other "... for poorer " they usually think in terms of financial poverty. Many couples are prepared to face at least a few years of financial hardship while they finish school, get established in their jobs or a business, or save for a home of their own. For most Americans true economic poverty that includes daily struggle for enough food to eat and a place to sleep is not part of their lives. Very few would choose this.

There is another kind of poverty; however, that thousands of couples do choose that is just as devastating to marriage as any economic poverty. This is a poverty that eats away at people from the inside and cannot be seen easily, so most don't even realize it is there. It is spiritual poverty—the loss of faith and faith community that pushes people away from one another and into the risky and lonely business of being an independent person, relying only on oneself. When things are going well, it is relatively easy to live without the presence of God in your life, but where does one turn when in crisis—needing help advice, comfort or prayer?

In a large percentage of marriages in the Catholic Church, one spouse is not Catholic. It is important that each spouse understands the faith of the other. This session explores the meaning of faith from the Catholic perspective as a source of information and discussion. It offers an opportunity for spouses of every faith, or no faith at all, to share their beliefs and attitudes.

Note: Leader asks each person to share what faith community they belong to; for example, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, etc., and what they like best about their parish or congregation. Leader begins sharing.

The Difficulty in Being Catholic

Many Catholics today find it difficult to belong fully to the Church. They often find themselves uncomfortable with some of its things or practices. Our society feels free to question Church teaching and to criticize it. When confronted with so much hostility, Catholics can either become very defensive about their faith, or silently give in and accept what society is saying about them. Then they become outsiders, looking in at their own faith community.

If the world says Catholics are old-fashioned or led by a pope who doesn't live in the real world, they may accept those judgments. They may also find themselves becoming critical of their own religious practices. Then the Mass may seem irrelevant, the music will displease them, the statues offend them, the homilies bore them, and the people who come to worship, annoy them.

Some Catholics see the Church as an organization, like the Rotary Club or Chamber of Commerce, and decide that the Church doesn't deserve their membership. Then they focus on the externals of being Catholic. They know there are rules and guidelines the Church sets down, and they don't like them. They may fear being

different from their friends or the people with whom they work. They may also be afraid the rules will curb their freedom, so they refuse to belong. Maybe they'll belong someday, when they have children or when they get old.

Catholics today are often going against popular opinion when they speak out on abortion, nuclear arms control, sex outside of marriage, birth control, celibacy, and economic justice, and not all Catholics agree on these issues. Some Catholics are embarrassed by the pious practices of other Catholics whom they consider to be old-fashioned. Some argue about maintaining the Catholic school system. Some get annoyed with Church organizations, meetings, or fund-raising activities. Others resist the idea that Catholics must attend Mass on Sunday or go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise One and shares own responses with the group. Then ask couples to proceed.

Exercise One: Difficulties in Belonging to Catholic Church (15 minutes)

Where do you find yourself in relationship to the Catholic Church? Put a checkmark next to any item that applies to you.

- _____ I married a Catholic but have no personal interest in the Church.
- _____ I have postponed making the decision to practice any faith, until I have children or grow older.
- _____ I am easily annoyed or embarrassed by Catholics.
- _____ I am critical of the Catholic Church
- _____ I am bored and disinterested in the Catholic Church.
- _____ I'd rather be called Christian than Catholic. I don't want to be Catholic just because my parents are Catholic.
- _____ I'm uncomfortable or disagree with the Church's positions on:
 - _____ Birth control
 - _____ Sex outside of marriage
 - _____ Abortion
 - _____ Nuclear arms
 - _____ Role of women in the Church
 - _____ Other (specify)
- _____ I don't know what the Catholic Church's positions are.
- _____ I gossip about Catholics (family, friends, priests, sisters).
- _____ I have had a bad experience with the Catholic Church.
- _____ I'm prejudiced against Catholics.
- _____ I believe that the Church has no right to tell me what to do.
- _____ I'm uncomfortable talking about Catholicism.
- _____ I see myself as more progressive than the Church.
- _____ I fear being different from my friends or family so I avoid getting involved in the Church.
- _____ I resist belonging to others. I prefer to be independent
- _____ I don't like to contribute to the Church
- _____ I ignore any teachings of the Church that I disagree with.
- _____ I accept criticisms of the Church that I hear from others.
- _____ I wish the Church would return to the way it was years ago.
- _____ I am not a Catholic but have thought about becoming Catholic.
- _____ Other (specify)

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

When you finish marking the list share your responses with your spouse

Note: Leader asks everyone to share their responses with the group. (10-15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

Being a Catholic means much more than merely doing "Catholic things" or accepting Catholic doctrine. Being Catholic means belonging fully to a faith family and living a certain way of life. It's similar to belonging to our spouse and our family of origin. Catholics share more than a name and a certain set of rules. They share a whole way of life that calls them to a special love for one another even if they don't always agree with or like each other.

There's a strong pressure in our society to conform, yet our conformity is costing us our identity as individuals. Most of us resist the idea of any Church having a voice in our decisions, yet we allow society to shape our decisions every day, while we tune out the voice of the faith community.

What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?

Sooner or later, everyone who wishes to be a follower of Christ must make a faith decision. When people from Christian denominations speak of being "born again" in Christ, they are speaking of this decision. They have decided to live their lives as followers of Christ and to live fully as members of their faith community.

In our parents' generation this decision was usually not deliberate because "keeping the faith" was a deeply ingrained part of their tradition. Today, however, society teaches young people they should consciously decide which, if any, faith family they will belong to.

In many cases this is an uninformed decision or a non decision, postponed indefinitely while a couple gets on with other areas of life.

Most Catholics today were born into their faith and were baptized as infants. At baptism, the Catholic Church in effect, told their parents and godparents, "Raise this child for us. Nurture this child; teach him or her to love us; let this baby breathe us in and grow with us so that when this child becomes an adult, he or she will find us irresistible."

In Confirmation, a Catholic reaffirms the promises made for them at baptism. They say, "Yes, we want to be Catholic; to belong to you and live our lives as the way you do." When people decide to become Catholic adults they make the same faith decision that was made for others at baptism—to belong to other Catholics in their faith community

A Catholic is one who loves other Catholics. No one becomes a Catholic alone; each was loved into the Church by others. Usually, it was their parents who called them to the Church, but it may have been a brother or sister, a godparent or grandparent, a friend or teacher, or a spouse. Most people have been blessed with people of faith in their lives, people who were not afraid to say to them, "Follow me; do what I do; pray with me; belong to my faith."

Note: Leader goes through the directions for Exercise Two and shares own answers with the group. Then asks couples to proceed as directed.

Exercise Two: Great Catholics in My Life (10 minutes)

Go through the list below and check those who were the great Catholics in your life. If you are not a Catholic, who are the greatest Catholic people you know or have known personally?

_____	Spouse	_____	In-laws
_____	Father	_____	Mother
_____	Friend	_____	Godparent
_____	Grandparent	_____	Relative (specify)
_____	Teacher	_____	Neighbor
_____	Other (specify)		

Now go back over the list and put a star (*) next to the person who had the most influence on you.

How did this person Influence you? (Check all that apply.)

_____	by teaching me	_____	by example
_____	by loving me	_____	by accepting me
_____	by being present during an important time in my life	_____	all of the above
_____	by listening to me and caring for me		
_____	Others (specify)		

Describe this person in full detail, Mention the person's name and write down what it is that most attracts you to this person, either in the past or now.

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

When you have finished writing, share your answers with your spouse.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the whole group. (10-15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

God cares about us. He continually sends people into our lives to touch us and speak His love to us. When we reflect back on our lives, we can frequently see how He has been present to us, loving us and calling us to Himself. Most Catholics belong to their faith family because of other Catholics they have had in their lives. Non-Catholics who have responded to God's call to marry a Catholic are called to love at least this one special Catholic. Whether they practice their faith or not both partners need to be aware of where each stands on religious matters.

Prayer and Scripture

Note: Leader asks a group member to read the following Scripture passage aloud

Love your fellow Christians always. Do not neglect to show hospitality, for by that means some have entertained angels without knowing it. Be as mindful of prisoners as if you were sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you may yet suffer as they do. Let marriage be honored in every way and the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Do not love money but be content with what you have, for God has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I forsake you." Thus we may say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?" Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you; consider how their lives ended, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:1-7)

Note: Leader asks everyone to read aloud the following prayer, and to recite it at home each day until the next meeting.

Dear Father,
Help me to be faithful to You.
When I am tired, give me strength.
When I lose heart, give me courage.
When I find myself attracted to worldly things, remind me of Your call.
When I'm too busy, help me find time.
When I'm too independent let me feel needy.
When I'm too stubborn, soften my heart.

Father,
I want to follow You and remain close
to You all of my life.
I place myself in Your Hands
As well as my spouse and family.
Hold us safely in Your arms,
and carry us home to You someday. Amen.

Session Nine

"In Sickness...."

Introduction

Our society is the richest in the world, yet the majority of people in our country consider themselves to be struggling financially. We believe others always have more than we do—not just in terms of the things they possess, but also in terms of the quality of their lives. They appear to have more fun, more happiness, more exciting experiences. In our desire for more of everything, we believe we need more money, because we believe that only money will satisfy our endless desires.

For many people, earning money, investing it, worrying about it, and spending it have become a way of life. Money is no longer used as a tool to provide them with the necessities in life, but is used as an end in itself. The major sickness of our time is not to be found in medical clinics, but in the minds and hearts of people. It is the disease of consumerism—our never ending desire to have more of everything.

There isn't anything wrong with either money or material possessions. Everyone needs food for the table, a roof over their heads, clothes to wear, and the basic necessities of life. But when possessions—money, and the means to get them—become a large factor in a marriage, they take the emphasis off loving and place it on getting. Then a couple takes their love for granted, assuming their relationship will take care of itself while they pursue the things of life.

Our Attitudes about Wealth

We make a lot of assumptions about money. We believe that the rich have more control over their lives than the working class does. We daydream about what it would be like to buy whatever we want without worrying about the bills at the end of the month. We believe that if we become rich, we will also be happy; but if we are poor, we won't be very happy. Yet when we look at the personal lives of the rich, we frequently see divorce, alcoholism, and drug abuse. They don't seem to be happier than anyone else.

Some see wealth and possessions as a sign of God's favor—as though God loves the rich more than the poor. For others, their whole self-image is tied up in their possessions. They believe their car, furniture; clothes and home make a statement about who they are. On a personal level, they are well-groomed, stylish, trim, and tanned the year round. The image they create is important to them. They see people as winners on the road to success or losers who are going nowhere. They judge people on the basis of their appearance. For these people, life is a competitive game where one looks out for oneself.

Some people feel poor even though they have a very good income. Others feel rich even when they have very little. Much depends on the attitudes they have about money and the things that money can buy. Attitudes about material possessions can have a dramatic impact on the way a couple lives out their marriage.

Note: Leaders goes through directions for Exercise One and shares own responses with the group. Then asks couples to proceed according to the directions.

Exercise One: Our Attitudes about Wealth (5 minutes)

Part A

Put a checkmark next to the statement that best describes your attitude about money today.

- _____ I am only one step away from poverty
- _____ I never have enough money for what I need.
- _____ I get by on what I have
- _____ I have enough money
- _____ I have more than enough money.

Part B

According to your income, where do you believe you fit in society?

- _____ Rich
- _____ Above Average
- _____ Average
- _____ Below Average
- _____ Poor

Part C

How do you feel most of the time?

- _____ Rich
- _____ Poor

Couple Sharing (5 minutes)

Share your answers with your spouse.

Note. Leader invites everyone to share with the group their responses to the questions. (10 minutes)

Talking about Our Money

The most important thing about money in a marital relationship is that a couple talks about themselves and money, not just about money. It is essential to understand one another's values as well as expectations for the standard of living you will have.

A couple can start out very modestly and not be too concerned about their standard of living because they may secretly believe, "This will last only a short period of time. Soon we'll be earning more and be able to accumulate more and more things." Most people don't set their sights on riches, they only want a few more things. When they get those, they find they need a few more things and then more after that. Before they realize it, their marriage has become very consumer-oriented. Eventually, they come to measure success in their marriage in terms of what they have—a home of their own, two cars, designer clothing, fine furniture—rather than in terms of their growth in love and awareness of each other.

One of the best things a couple can do is deciding for themselves what their values are. Too often they may accept without question the values of their parents, their friends, or of society in general. They may find that it is more important to their parents that the couple be successful than it is to themselves. Their parents may need to see the couple's success as a sign of their own accomplishments as parents, so they can brag about their children to their friends.

Society also tells couples what's best for them. Frequently a honeymoon is planned on the basis of what a travel agent or "Brides" magazine recommends, even though that type of vacation would ordinarily never appeal to the couple. Likewise, a couple may postpone having a family because the experts advise them to take their time, get themselves established, and have several years together before settling down.

In a society that sees children as a burden, almost everyone discourages a large family, particularly if a couple has a modest income. It is automatically assumed that children will be deprived if they have many brothers and sisters. No one talks about the deprivation of the child in the small family where loneliness is a way of life. Interestingly, most children want brothers and sisters.

We need to set our own priorities about how we will live and use our money. We can't blindly take other's values as our own and then live our lives by them. We need to listen to one another and determine what we want to do as a couple.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise Two and shares own responses to the sections that call for couple sharing. Then asks the couples to proceed according the directions.

Exercise Two: Examining Our Values

Go through the following lists and put a check mark next to the items that most clearly describe your attitudes in each area

Part A: Housing

- _____ I would always like to live in an apartment.
- _____ I would like to buy our own home someday.
- _____ I would like a better house than we have now
- _____ A nice place to live is essential to me
- _____ I hate apartment living.
- _____ Owning a home can be a financial burden
- _____ I don't care where we live
- _____ Other (specify)

Part B: Furniture and Decorations

- _____ I like nice things.
- _____ I like it somewhat nice.
- _____ As long as it's clean, I don't care
- _____ I never notice anything.
- _____ I'm willing to live with old and used furniture.
- _____ Others (specify)

Part C: Automobiles

- _____ It's a sign of social status.
- _____ I like having a new car
- _____ I don't care how old it is as long as it runs.
- _____ I couldn't live without a car of my own.
- _____ It's a sign of independence and freedom
- _____ I'm not interested in owning a car

Part D: Clothing

- _____ I like to dress well.
- _____ I'm willing to spend a lot of money to achieve the right look.
- _____ I like to look nice, but always shop for bargains.
- _____ I could care less about fashion or style.
- _____ I dress for comfort.
- _____ I admit it; I'm a slob.
- _____ Other (specify)

Do you think your spouse spends on clothing?

- _____ Too much
- _____ Just right amount
- _____ Not enough

Would you like to spend more money?

- _____ On your clothes
- _____ On your spouse's clothes
- _____ On your children's clothes

Part E: Vacations

Do you believe you should set aside time for a vacation each year?

_____ Yes _____ No

What kinds of things make you most happy on vacation?

- _____ Going to an exciting place.
- _____ Being at the seashore.
- _____ Relaxing totally
- _____ Being with family and friends
- _____ Catching up on work
- _____ Going to a quiet place.
- _____ Being in the mountains
- _____ Keeping busy.
- _____ Other (specify)

Are you willing to sacrifice what you spend on other things in order to take a nice vacation?

_____ Yes _____ No

Part F: Gift Giving

What is your attitude about giving gifts, especially at Christmas, birthdays, or family celebrations?

- _____ I spend more than I have. .
- _____ I budget what we can afford and stick to it
- _____ I see gifts as a sign of love and affection.
- _____ Gifts are unimportant if you really love someone
- _____ I try to avoid giving gifts
- _____ I make my own gifts.
- _____ Other (specify)

Part G: Recreation, Socializing

Put a checkmark next to those activities you do at least once every two. weeks.

- _____ Eat out in a restaurant.
- _____ Eat out in a fast food place
- _____ Participate in a health club or YMCA.
- _____ Attend movies.
- _____ Entertain guests at home

- _____ Go dancing.
- _____ Frequent a bar.
- _____ Go bowling, bicycling, skiing, etc.
- _____ Buy equipment or supplies for a hobby.
- _____ Take long walks.
- _____ Have hair styled.
- _____ Other (specify)

Are you willing to spend less money in this area?

_____ Yes _____ No

Part H: Savings

How much money would you like to save each year? _____

How much money do you actually save? _____

Are you willing to make sacrifices in order to save? _____

_____ Yes _____ No

What are you willing to sacrifice in order to save money? _____

In which of the following categories do you believe you and your spouse could spend less money?

- _____ Housing
- _____ Automobile (hers)
- _____ Automobile (his)
- _____ Clothing (hers)
- _____ Clothing (his)
- _____ Vacation
- _____ Gift Giving
- _____ Recreation & Socializing (his)
- _____ Recreation & Socializing (hers)
- _____ Other (specify)

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

Share your responses to parts A through H with your spouse. Then proceed.

Part I: Charity

What are your attitudes about giving to charity or worthy causes?

- _____ I resent it.
- _____ I give at work
- _____ I donate to everything that comes along.
- _____ I feel overburdened.
- _____ I never have enough money to give any away.
- _____ I like to give to others.

With most couples, one is more generous than the other. Who is the most generous in your family?

_____ I Am _____ My Spouse Is

How do you feel when your spouse gives away your money without talking about it with you first?

_____ I don't mind
_____ I get upset
_____ I'm very pleased
_____ I see it as irresponsible
_____ It never happens

Part J: Tithing

Scripture invites us to give away at least 10% of our income to the Church or charity (One formula people use today is to give 5% of gross income to the Church and 5% to charity) Jesus goes even further and tells us not to be anxious even about the necessities of life.

In Matthew 6:25-32, we read:

I warn you, then: do not worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use of clothing. Is not life more than food? Is not the body more valuable than the clothes?

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Which of you by worrying can add a moment to his life-span? As for clothes, why be concerned? Learn a lesson from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work; they do not spin. Yet I assure you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was arrayed like one of these. If God can clothe in such splendor the grass of the field, which blooms today and is thrown on the fire tomorrow, will he not provide much more for you, O weak in faith? Stop worrying, then, over questions like, "What are we to eat, or what are we to drink or what are we to wear?" The unbelievers are always running after these things. Your heavenly Father knows all that you need.

When you read these words, how do you feel?

_____ Hopeful—I trust in God to provide.
_____ Skeptical—I'm not sure God will provide
_____ Fearful—I'm quite sure I have to provide
_____ Independent—I like to take care of myself
_____ Other (specify)

What percentage of your total gross income do you actually give to Church or charity right now? _____

What percentage would you like to give? _____

Are you willing to make sacrifices in your current lifestyle in order to have more money to give away?

_____ Yes _____ No

What are you willing to sacrifice?

Couple Sharing (5 minutes)

Share your responses of Part I and J with your spouse

Part K

Base on all your previous answers, put a checkmark next to those items you value most (the things where you actually spend most of your money, time and energy).

_____	Good Place to Live
_____	Nice Furniture
_____	My Car
_____	My Spouse's Clothes
_____	Our Vacation
_____	Gift Giving
_____	Recreation and Socializing
_____	Saving Money
_____	Giving Money to Charity

If you could change one way about the way you currently spend your money, what would you change?

Couple Sharing (3 minutes)

Share your responses to part K with your spouse

Note: Leader invites everyone to share with the group what they have learned in this exercise and how it has affected them. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

The purpose of money and our possessions is to enable us to live a full human life so we can love one another. Yet, as we examine our attitudes about our possessions, we can see that it takes a great amount of time and energy to buy all we want to make us happy. Even after we own things, it's expensive to maintain them. While our possessions free us in some ways, they also enslave us.

If we let our attitudes be shaped by our friends and society, we'll find that we have an almost unlimited appetite for things. It's easy to mortgage away our future by buying

all we want today. It's easy to live on two incomes and then realize that we can't afford to have one of us quit work or go to a lesser job because we need every dollar we earn. It's easy to postpone or limit the biggest and most rewarding experience a married couple can have—rearing children—because it's expensive to raise a family.

Closing Prayer

The Psalms are the ancient prayer of the Church. As we reflect on our trust in God to care for our needs, let us pray together from Psalm 23:

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me; He refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil;
For you are at my side
With your rod and your staff that give me courage.*

*You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.*

This prayer is good to keep in mind as we go about our daily work.

Note: The next session is about writing a budget. Tell them that if they would like to work on writing their personal budgets, they should bring with them a list of all their expenses and income. Since each couple will be working separately, all the data they bring will be kept confidential.



Session Ten

"... And in Health

Note: Leader invites someone to read aloud the verses below:

Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Introduction

One of the most difficult things that has to be worked out in every marriage is money, especially who handles it. There is no definite answer as to who should do it but, clearly, it must be done. It should be done with continual input from both partners as well.

Part of loving and respecting one another in marriage is to pledge to work together to use wisely whatever resources we have. Openness and mutual responsibility in financial matters are necessary. The trust established in this area can carry over into other areas as well.

In the Scripture verses just read, we are reminded not to focus on our earthly treasure but on our heavenly treasure. By living within our income and controlling our desire for material possessions, we can free ourselves from the constant harassment of financial worries. Then we can put our hearts where they belong—with one another and God.

Becoming One in Mind

It may be true that two can live as cheaply as one, especially if they each had their own apartments before marriage. It is not true that two can always think as one when it comes to spending their money. In fact, one of the most difficult things to do in a marriage is to think of all money that comes in as ours, not mine and yours, and to trust one another with what we have.

Some couples come into marriage with a lot of bad habits; most come in with the mentality of a single person about how money should be spent. Each partner usually thinks that he or she knows best how to handle money. Generally, single people spend money differently than married couples do. They frequently spend a lot more on recreation, entertainment, and leisure time activities. Saving for a home or a family is simply not part of most singles' mindset.

As single people, the partners were free to spend their money in any way they chose, even when on a tight budget.

She might skimp on meals in order to have more money for clothes. Now she finds that he wants a big meal every night. He might be indifferent to clothing and consider

what she spends as excessive—even when it's a normal expense. She may decide he's just cheap.

One area a couple will have to agree on is buying on credit. As a single person, each could buy on impulse or charge whatever was wanted without considering anyone else. As a married couple, all debt is a couple-debt and cannot be entered into without the knowledge of the other partner. Few things destroy trust more than having one spouse surprise the other at the end of the month with unpaid charges made on credit cards.

Credit cards cost money—not to the company—to the people who use them. While they offer instant gratification, they can cause long term misery if they are not used carefully and wisely. Furthermore, they can trap people into a style of life higher than they can afford and allow them little opportunity to move, change jobs or start a family.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise One and shares own responses. Then couples proceed.

Exercise One: What Are Our Habits? (6 minutes)

Go through the list and put a checkmark next to the item(s) that best describe you. Then go back through and put a checkmark next to the item(s) that best describe your spouse.

As far as spending habits go:

I Am	You Are	
_____	_____	Thrifty
_____	_____	Impulsive
_____	_____	One who needs to buy groceries on a full stomach
_____	_____	One who sticks to a budget
_____	_____	Easily swayed
_____	_____	Hates shopping
_____	_____	A sucker
_____	_____	Refuses to shop around
_____	_____	Compares all the prices
_____	_____	Champagne taste and a beer budget
_____	_____	A hard sell
_____	_____	Tempted to overdo it with credit cards
_____	_____	Other (specify)

What items do you believe it is okay to buy on credit? Put a checkmark next to all that apply

_____	Car	_____	Furniture
_____	Clothes	_____	Jewelry
_____	Dishwasher	_____	Education
_____	Vacations	_____	Sport Equipment
_____	Washing Machine	_____	Clothes Dryer
_____	Second Car	_____	Car Repairs
_____	Travel	_____	Sewing Machine
_____	Medical Bills	_____	Entertainment
_____	Hobby/Lessons	_____	Small Appliances
_____	Musical Instrument	_____	Gasoline
_____	Television Set	_____	Groceries
_____	Stereo	_____	Dental Bills

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

Share your answers with your spouse.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the group. (10-15 minutes)

Fears about Working Together

It can be very threatening to totally trust one another with the family finances. Some people have been making independent decisions about how they spend their money for years, and they really don't want anyone else telling them how to do it. They value their independence. Others see themselves as not very good at handling money. They either haven't had much experience with it, or they don't believe they've done well in the past. They may be afraid of criticism. Others don't want to tell their husband or wife exactly how much they earn because they like to set aside a little money of their own from time to time. They feel more secure having their own little nest egg.

Still others see themselves as experts in the area of finances. They believe they are mature and very capable and gladly assume full responsibility. This gives them control of their money. These people usually have a superior attitude toward their spouse because they believe that they alone know how to spend or save money wisely. They don't really welcome input from their spouse about how their money should be used; they want to do it all.

In some marriages, one partner simply gets stuck paying the bills. Neither one wants to do it, and the more irresponsible partner will ignore the bills as long as possible, thus forcing the other person to take care of them.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise Two and shares own responses. Then couples proceed.

Exercise Two: Which Type of Person Are You? (10 minutes)

Go over the list below and check the item (s) that best describe you: Then go back over the list and check the item(s) that best describe your spouse.

Husband

Wife

_____	_____	Threatened by any discussion of finances.
_____	_____	Independent: My money is my own.
_____	_____	Incompetent I don't handle money well.
_____	_____	Secretive: I refuse to tell all that I earn
_____	_____	Insecure: I like to keep a "slush fund" of my own on the side.
_____	_____	Expert: I handle money well.
_____	_____	Responsible: I don't want to do it, but I will.
_____	_____	Irresponsible: I won't bother with it.
_____	_____	Superior: I can handle money better than my spouse.
_____	_____	Other (specify)

How do you feel about pooling all your financial resources and putting all your money into a common pot?

_____	Excited
_____	Cautious
_____	Threatened
_____	Very Willing
_____	Unsure

How do you feel about having a budget that both of you have worked out together?

_____	Relieved
_____	Very Pleased
_____	Fearful
_____	Annoyed
_____	Okay

How do you feel about sharing the responsibility for handling your money?

_____	Willing
_____	Unwilling

Couple Sharing (15 minutes)

After you finish writing your responses, share your answers with your spouse. Then discuss the following questions: -

1. How do my attitudes about money affect our relationship?
2. What changes can I make in order to do better, either in the way to handle money or the attitude I have about it?

Note: Leaders invites everyone to share their responses with the group (10-15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

Privacy independence, superiority, distrust, and responsibility are wedges in a marriage that can lead to many hard feelings and fights. They can also lead to game playing in a marriage where the partner who feels powerless will secretly charge things in order to get what he or she wants or the one who has control will have secret bank accounts. Some women refuse to put their paycheck into the family funds. Instead they want to control it themselves. Many couples view their pay checks as "her money" or "his money/" not "their money."

In order to handle their finances well, a couple needs to be wise stewards. They need to work together to decide when and how their money should be spent. The best way to achieve this is by sitting down together and, in an atmosphere of honesty and trust, work out a budget.

Budgeting Your Money

Here are a few simple guidelines to keep in mind about money that will help keep peace in a marriage.

- Neither partner should decide to buy something especially a major purchase, without first discussing it with their spouse. Making a decision first and then presenting it to their spouse puts great pressure on that person and forces him or her to either go along with the decision already made or to be critical and say no to the decision.
- Neither partner should buy anything significant without consulting the other. It's a shock to find out that large amounts of money have been taken from savings or have been charged.
- It is not necessary for both partners to get equal amounts of money from the budget. For example one may need to spend more on clothing than the other. One may need more for lunches than the other.
- All decisions to spend or save should be based on what is best for their relationship. A budget is most helpful for this because it includes input from both partners about how their money should be used and accommodates the needs each expresses.

For some people, the word "budget" is a bad word. They hear instead 'constraint' or 'control'. They fear not being able to buy things they want or need. They resist being held accountable for what they spend. They enjoy the apparent freedom they have in living without a budget. At least until the bills come due. Then there is the moment of reckoning and the dread of trying to make a paycheck stretch to cover the impossible.

Ideally, a budget is very freeing for a couple. It must include the ideas of both, the wants and needs both would like to see met. In addition to providing for all mandatory expenses, there should be some money set aside for each one to spend as he or she wishes, even if it's only a few dollars a week. Include long-term goals, such as buying a house, as well as short-term items you'd like to have, such as a

vacation or a piece of furniture. A budget should also include money for gifts and for charity.

Note: Leader gives directions for Exercise Three and shares his or her experience of doing it. The couples can either take the Workbook and complete the exercise at home, or work on it now, during this session. In any case, the leaders should give a thorough description of the directions to the couples. After the directions have been given, the couples can work together privately on their own budgets, calling on the leaders for any help they want.

Exercise Three: Writing a Budget

Step 1

It is important that you do this exercise as a couple because each decision in a budget should be agreed to by each partner. Don't choose amounts on the basis of being fair to each other or on the basis of the tit for tat theory (for example, because the husband get S\$20 a month for cable TV, the wife gets \$20 for membership in health spa.) Make each decision on the basis of what is best for you as a couple and on what your needs truly are.

Using the chart on the following page, make a list of all your expenses. These should be the normal expenses you have each month (such as rent, heat, newspaper and so forth). Record these in the Monthly column.

Then list expenses that occur only every few months or once a year (such as subscriptions, car insurance, etc) and record these in either the biyearly or yearly column. Be sure to list every bill you have. You may want to bring out old bills to remind you of what you have spent in the past year.

Expenses

Budget Item	Monthly	Biyearly	Yearly
Rent/Mortgage			
Heat/ Air Conditioning			
Electricity			
Water			
Phone			
Groceries & Household Expenses			
Furniture			
Clothing			
Medical/Dental			
Car Payment (s)			
Gasoline			
Car Maintenance			
Car Insurance			
Life Insurance			
Savings			
Church/Charity			
Recreation			
Gift Fund			
Vacation Fund			
Credit Cards			
Loans			
Magazine/Newspaper			
Tuition			
Personal Allowance (Wife)			
Personal Allowance (Husband)			

Step 2

Using the following chart, make a list of all your financial resources.

- Write down your net income (after taxes, social security, etc., have been taken out) for each one of you, noting whether it is weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.
- Write down balances in all checking accounts or savings accounts.
- Include every source of income you will have in the year, such as annual dividends from insurance policies or stocks, tax refunds, salary from second jobs, inheritance, and so forth.

Remember, this budget is being set up to be paid twice a month, or a total of twenty-four payments per year. If you are being paid every two weeks, you will actually get twenty-six paychecks per year. This means you will have an "extra" paycheck in the summer and in the winter which can be used to make lump-sum payments of bills for car insurance, vacation, tuition, Christmas gifts, etc. If you are both working, it is well worth considering living on only one paycheck and saving the other. This lessens the impact of having a baby, going back to school, etc., and gives you considerable freedom in planning your future.

Financial Resources

	Weekly	Biweekly	Monthly
Net Income (His)			
Net Income (Hers)			
Total Net Income (His + Hers)			
Balance in Checking Account(s)			
Balance in Savings Account(s)			
Amount of Annual Dividends Due			
Amount of Annual Tax Refunds Due			
Salary from Second Job(s)			

Step 3

Calculate the monthly cost of each bill in step 1 so you have a single list of all your monthly expenses. Then add up all of these monthly expenses.

Step 4

Calculate your net monthly income as a couple by adding together both of your regular net paychecks. Remember to calculate this on a monthly basis.

Step 5

Compare your net monthly income (from step 4) with your net monthly expenses (from step 3). If your expenses are greater than your income, go back over all the items on the budget and decide as a couple to reduce the amounts spent wherever possible.

If your absolute minimum expenses still exceed your income, decide how you might be able to increase your income. This decision should be made in light of how it will affect your couple relationship. The questions below might help you.

Will you have a stronger relationship if one of you: (Mark Y for yes, N for no.)

_____ Returns to Work
_____ Looks for a Better Paying Job
_____ Gets a Second Job

Will your relationship be stronger if you keep the job(s) you have and reduce your spending?

_____ Yes
_____ No

What additional reductions can you both agree to make?

Step 6

Now that you have listed both your expenses and resources, you can figure out a final budget that is mutually acceptable. Since you've each had the opportunity to discuss your views about your money, you may wish to share on the following

question:

How do I feel, knowing that you have listened to my opinions about our money?

Wrap-Up

Many people simply don't like dealing with numbers and with decisions about spending money, so they avoid planning a budget at all. But the best way to decrease the pain of working with numbers is to sit down together, plan a budget, and then stick with it. This leaves you both free to enjoy what you have, knowing that there will be money to pay your bills every month. Budgeting can be a very liberating experience and free us for the things in life we really enjoy.

Prayer

This prayer can be recited aloud together now and then everyday at home until we meet again.

May God, the eternal Father, keep us in love with each other

May He help us keep our focus on each other, so that the peace of Christ may stay with us and be always in our home

May He gradually turn us away from the desire to own more than we need and help us to be grateful for what we have.

Amen.



Session Eleven

"...For As Long As We Both Shall Live"

Note: Leader asks someone to read aloud the verses below:

As for the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father only. The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time. In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and being married, right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They were totally unconcerned until the flood came and destroyed them. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal; one will be taken and one will be left. Stay awake, therefore! You cannot know the day your Lord is coming.

Be sure of this: if the owner of the house knew when the thief was coming he would keep a watchful eye and not allow his house to be broken into. You must be prepared in the same way. The Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect. (Matthew 24:36-44)

Introduction

On their wedding day, the couple entering into Matrimony promise to love one another, "...for as long as we both shall live." Some versions of the vows conclude with, "... until death do us part" In either case, a couple promises to love one another and remain married until the death of one partner.

When they say those vows on their wedding day, it seems as though they will have a long, long time to love one another. Almost as quickly as their marriage begins, they begin to take one another for granted. If they have forever to love one another, they believe love can wait until tomorrow; today they have work to do, games to play, friends to meet.

For some couples, death comes very soon, and they are unprepared. For others, death will not arrive for over fifty or sixty years, but still they find themselves unprepared. They always assumed they had tomorrow to do the things that were important to them—like loving. In every great marriage, death always comes too soon; the couple wants to be together forever. But in every great marriage the couple is also prepared because they have always lived in love. The best way to prepare for death is to live life fully in the present, taking one day at a time, loving each other as completely as we possibly can.

Note: Leaders share a time when they were very aware of being loved by their spouse, and how life giving that was. Then ask the couples to turn to each other and share a time when they were especially aware of how much they loved their spouse.

Throughout the past few months, we have talked about how we can become great lovers. We discussed the call to be one as a couple, to build that oneness by

communicating well with one another, both verbally and nonverbally. We also talked about many different areas that require good communications—sex, God, and material possessions.

Now we carry forward all that we learned so far and pull it together so that love will grow each day, "... as long as we both shall live."

Living a Passionate Lifestyle

The Sacrament of Matrimony draws us out of ourselves and calls us to go more deeply into intimacy than we ever thought possible or even desirable. Some people live all their lives on the surface of things. They settle for just getting along, for living together as two nice people who may be kind to one another and enjoy a few sexual privileges together, but who are basically strangers to one another. Some fear intimacy because they fear being vulnerable. They don't want to risk the pain that would come if their spouse died. They don't want to be too emotionally involved in case there is a divorce.

Such people only live half alive. They may never know the depths of pain at the death of a spouse, but they've never experienced the incredible joy of total surrender of oneself to another. The person who avoids real intimacy is a very lonely person.

Matrimony calls two people to a passionate lifestyle. In this deep commitment to and involvement with one another, they will touch on deep emotions, attitudes, and beliefs. They will discover things about themselves and one another they never knew existed. In a passionate relationship, there are sure to be clashes from time to time. Society encourages us to live without admitting any conflict; peace at any price. But a couple cannot grow in intimacy unless they can honestly face their differences.

No one likes to fight, and fighting is not recommended as a regular part of a daily routine. However, there are times when it is necessary to argue with one another in order to clear the air and grow in understanding of ourselves and one another. It's important to understand that when we talk about fighting we are talking about a verbal exchange of words. Physical abuse, throwing things, or threats are never acceptable behavior.

When certain topics are never discussed, spouses are more likely to withdraw from one another rather than be close. So though complete harmony all the time may seem like an ideal to strive for, it really isn't. It indicates a sterile relationship without real depth or passion.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise One and shares own responses. Then couples proceed.

Exercise One: Why Do We Have Fights? (5 minutes)

Fights in marriage occur for many reasons, including the following. Put a checkmark next to those that best describe why you and your spouse fight.

- _____ Selfishness: We each want to get our own way.
- _____ Self-righteousness: We each believe we are right about an issue.
- _____ Superiority: We want to change our spouse to be more like ourselves.
- _____ Loneliness that comes from seeing ourselves as misunderstood.
- _____ Judgments we make about each other.
- _____ Tension from sexual dissatisfaction.
- _____ Exhaustion from too many outside distractions
- _____ Hurt from thoughtlessness, indifference, or careless words.
- _____ Personality clashes from two people who are basically very different.
- _____ Other (specify)

We also have reasons why we avoid fighting. Put a checkmark next to the item(s) that best describe you.

When we fight, I most fear.....

- _____ Divorce
- _____ Physical abuse
- _____ That you'll reject me
- _____ That we won't be able to resolve our differences
- _____ That we won't be able to forgive each other
- _____ Name-calling
- _____ You'll withhold sex from me
- _____ That we don't have a happy marriage
- _____ Being put down by you
- _____ That the fight will make matters worse
- _____ Other (specify)

Couple Sharing (5 minutes)

Share your answers with your spouse.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the group (10-15 minutes)

Attitudes about Fights

In fighting we reveal a great deal about ourselves to one another. At these times, we are at our worst. We are most critical, most judgmental, most aggressive, most hostile, etc. We don't even like ourselves when we're like that. That's one reason why we try to avoid a fight.

We are also influenced by what we experienced in our parents' homes as we watched them work out, or fail to work out their problems. If we grew up in a household where people never raised their voices or argue with one another, we may have concluded that in a good marriage, people never fight. If we saw our father as father as good guy who never argued, we might assume that's how the ideal man should be. If we grow up in a household where anger, harsh words, and slammed doors were a part of everyday life, we may believe this is the only way to fight.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise Two and shares own responses. Then couples proceed.

Exercise Two: Attitudes about Fighting (10 minutes)

How did your parents or guardians fight? Put a checkmark next to those items that apply.

- _____ They never fought.
- _____ They fought loudly and with much anger.
- _____ My father refused to fight.
- _____ My mother always gave in to my father.
- _____ They called each other names.
- _____ My mother started most arguments.
- _____ My father was a "nice guy."
- _____ One of my parents was permanently angry.
- _____ My parents fought physically.
- _____ Coolness lasted for days.
- _____ They never really forgave each other.
- _____ My parents never raised their voices to each other.
- _____ The rest of the family frequently became involved in their arguments.
- _____ My father liked to shout.
- _____ My mother always cried.
- _____ One of them would walk out on the fight.
- _____ My parents fought constantly and seemed to enjoy it.

Now go back through the list and put a star (*) next to those patterns of behavior that are present in you. (For example, my father was a nice guy and I try to be a nice guy; too. My mother always cried and I usually cry, too.)

What attitudes do you have today about fighting in marriage? Put a checkmark next to those that best describe you.

- _____ It's up to the woman to bring difficult issues out into the open.
- _____ It's best if we never discuss our differences.
- _____ Some people like to create conflict.
- _____ A good person walks away from a fight.
- _____ Fighting only makes things worse.
- _____ If we don't fight, how can I change my spouse?
- _____ If you really loved me, you wouldn't want to fight.
- _____ People should not raise their voices when they argue.
- _____ You can generally ignore what a woman says until she gets angry about things.
- _____ It's part of a man's masculinity to be loud and aggressive in arguing
- _____ Fighting can draw us closer together.
- _____ People would be better off if they left well enough alone.

Write your initials to those items below which best describe you. Then go back through and put your spouse's initials next to those which describe him or her.

When it comes to a fight

I Am	Spouse Is	
_____	_____	Very Sensitive
_____	_____	Thin-skinned
_____	_____	Fair-minded
_____	_____	Usually Right
_____	_____	Easily Hurt
_____	_____	The One Who Usually Starts It
_____	_____	Indifferent
_____	_____	Calm
_____	_____	The One Who Gives In First
_____	_____	Totally Frustrated
_____	_____	Thick-skinned

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

When you finish writing, share your answers with your spouse. Be sure to discuss the attitudes you see in each other.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the group. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up

Whether we like it or not, we are influenced by the way our parents or guardians handled their differences. We may try to be just like them if they seemed to be models of good behavior, or we may try to be totally different if we did not respect their behavior.

Even so-called good behavior may be offensive to a spouse. A doormat who gives in all the time in an argument does not give adequate feedback to a spouse about the problems in a relationship; neither does a nice guy who refuses to fight. The other partner in the marriage may conclude, "You don't care enough about our relationship even to argue with me."

A person who claims to be totally content in a marriage all the time may be refusing to grow deeply into the relationship. Wherever we are with fighting and disagreements, we can learn how to handle our differences constructively.

Rules for a Fair Fight

If you experienced the Engaged Encounter Weekend or Marriage Encounter, you have already heard these rules. Frequently when couples hear them for the first time however, they don't listen very well or take them seriously. The rules are important; they allow a couple to get at their differences and deal with them quickly and positively. They should be a part of every married couple's lives. Because we believe this material is worth referring to from time to time, we include it in your Workbook.

Note: Leader invites couples to follow along in their Workbooks while the rules are read. You may choose to have them take turns reading this material aloud.

Rules for Fighting

Focus on the Issue

Often the surface issue that started the fight is not the real issue. Look deeper into your relationship to find the real issue. (For example, the wife may be furious that her husband invited guests over without telling her. Perhaps her anger comes from the fact that their apartment is dirty and he never helps clean it. She sees the invitation to have guests as one more sign of his thoughtless behavior.)

No Ancient History Allowed

Don't bring up anything that is more than forty-eight hours old. If the issue is that your spouse has blown the budget, stick to this time that the budget was blown. Don't get into statements like, "You always do this," and "You never do that." Your spouse can answer for what has happened recently and should not have to account for the sins of a lifetime every time you disagree.

No Name-Calling

You are fighting with the person you love most in the world—the one especially chosen for you by God. You are fighting because you disagree about something, and each of you sincerely believes she or he is right. Probably each of you does have a piece of the truth on your side. But what matters most is that you love each other and have vowed to become one. You are both on the same side of the issue of the pursuit of oneness; you simply differ on how to get there. Names and insults can hurt long after the fight is over, so resolve not to add this offense to your disagreements.

No Hitting Below the Belt

Hitting below the belt is verbally hitting the person where we know it will hurt the most. For example, the issue might be related to whether or not the couple will spend their vacation at their in-laws. Suddenly, the husband will say, "Not only are you unreasonable about this, but you're terrible in bed as well. It has nothing to do with the issue at hand, but is brought up to shake up the spouse and "win" the argument. In any argument between married couples, if one loses, both lose.

Don't Let the Sun Set on Your Anger

Have the fight and settle your differences before you go to bed that night. Time, distance, and coolness do not heal all wounds, but build calluses over them. They can poison a relationship.

Hold Hands while Fighting

This sounds very trivial and silly. Our reaction upon hearing this rule was, "How can you fight with anyone if you're holding hands?" You can't for very long. That's the point. When we hold hands, we constantly receive the message that we are in the presence of our beloved. The issue that divides us is insignificant compared to the intensity of our love for each other. This is one of the fastest known ways to end a fight.

Make Up after a Fight

You have just been through a crisis together. Take some time to be together, to be tender and loving, to make love, to talk quietly, and to pray. Celebrate the trust you have in each other, the new awareness's you share, and the commitments you've made to try harder to be more thoughtful, less selfish, and more caring.

You May Agree to Disagree

Some issues take years to settle, but they need not divide the couple in the rest of their relationship. (For example, a couple may disagree about how their money should be spent. They may have an argument over a specific detail that has to be settled and then decide that in the weeks and months ahead they will continue to discuss the issue, working toward some common ground they can both agree on.)

Living a Lifetime Together

A sacramental marriage is meant to last a lifetime; it deserves the best that both partners have to bring to it. It is interesting to note how our behavior changes when we have word of the death of a relative or close friend. Suddenly, everything we have been doing takes second place, even things that we considered to be vitally important. We rearrange our schedules and make ourselves available. If necessary, we travel for miles to be present at the wake or funeral.

For a few days or a few hours, we reflect on how short life really is, and how much we miss the person who has died. Sometimes we feel regret for not having spent more time with that person or not having reconciled with him or her. Frequently, we wish that we had told the person, "I love you," more often. Then we go back home resume our lives, and return to our old way of doing things. Reflecting on death should help us decide how we would like to live our lives.

Note: Leader goes through directions for Exercise Three and shares own responses. Then couples proceed.

Exercise Three: How Do I Want to Live? (10 minutes)

If you knew that you and your spouse had only one week to live, how would you spend your time between now and then? Write fully in as much detail as possible. (What would you do? Where would you go? Whom would you want to see? What would you want to say to them?)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Couple Sharing (10 minutes)

Share your answer with your spouse.

Note: Leader invites everyone to share their responses with the group. (15-20 minutes)

Wrap-Up

Some would say this is an unfair question or one not worth discussing. Yet it's a question that brings out all that is deepest within us. When we recall the Scripture we read on page iv (Jeremiah 17:7-8), we really don't know how long we have to live.

If we find that our answer to this question is that we'd keep on doing what we're doing now, we probably have our lives in order. We are prepared for Jesus' coming. However, if we find there is a vast difference between how we are living and how we would live if time was running out, we need to look at what we're doing and start to change our ways. Time is running out.

Prayer

It is appropriate to renew our commitment to one another at this time.
Let us pray together:

Holy Creator of Love,
We celebrate and renew our mutual lives that are lived as one.
We reseal, by this holy prayer, our commitment to each other to a life
of shared dreams, thoughts and feelings.
We ask Your holy help so that we may be always awake to the needs
of each other, needs both spoken and unspoken.
May our two but twin pathways lead us to the fullness of life and to You.
We ask Your divine protection from the strong tides of daily troubles that tend to pull
us away from each other.
Shield us from the social sickness of no commitment.
Show us how to re channel the hidden streams of selfishness that always threaten to
separate us.
Lord, it was said by the ancients that from each of us flows a light that reaches
straight to heaven, that when two persons destined to be united come together,
their two streams fuse into a single bright beam reaching to heaven and giving
splendor to the entire universe.

We ask that our love for each other shine as a single flame to all.
Amen.



1. From: Prayers for the Domestic Church, by Edward Hays (Easton, Kansas: Forest of Peace Books, Inc., 1979).

Session Twelve

A Celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony

Note:

This session is meant to be a night of celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony and includes renewal of the wedding vows. The celebration may be done quietly in the home with a few couples or it may be a large, parish-wide celebration to which all married couples are invited. It may include Mass or it may be done as a paraliturgy. Choose the ideas that are best for you and your group. If you are using Evergreen as a single couple you can use paraliturgy format by sharing the task of reading aloud the Scripture readings and discussing how you are affected by the readings. Then jointly read aloud the renewal of vows, and read the blessing to each other.

PARALITURGY

First Reading

Tobit 8:5-10 (The wedding prayer of Tobiah and Sarah)

Second Reading

1 John 4:7—12 (If we love one another, God dwells in us and His love is brought to perfection in us.)

Gospel Reading

John 17:20-23 (Jesus prays that we become one.)

Group Sharing

Each person shares with the whole group how he or she is affected by these readings.

Renewal of Vows

Note: The couples are called forward in the church or stand facing one another in the home. They may light a candle if they wish as a sign of the love they bring to one another and the world. The leader or priest guides them as they recite the renewal vows:

"I, (name), renew with you, (name), the vows I made on our wedding day. I promise to love you in all our good times and our difficult times, whether we are rich or poor, or sick or healthy. I will love you and be true to you as long as we both shall live."

Blessing of the Couples

The leader (or the priest) extends his right hand and says,

"May God bless you and watch over you and your family. May you always know His presence with you; may you experience His arms wrapped around you and His heart reaching out to yours. And may we all gather together again one day to celebrate with Him in paradise, never to leave His presence. Amen."

A Celebration in the Parish

Note: The parish may wish to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony on a parish-wide basis for all married couples. The following suggestions are offered for such a gathering. You may want to adapt them for your own needs.

1. Choose an appropriate time and place. Holy Family Sunday, which falls between Christmas and New Years, is a good time as is any day in the month of June. You may wish to use one of the Saturday evening liturgies, especially if you plan to follow the liturgy with a party.
2. All parishioners may be invited either through announcements from the pulpit and in the church bulletin or through direct contact, such as having an inexpensive wedding invitation printed and mailed to all parishioners. It could read:

The people of St. Mary's Parish request the honor of your presence at a ceremony celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony. This celebration of love will be Saturday, fourteenth of June nineteen hundred and (year) at seven o'clock in the evening of St. Mary's Catholic Church 135 Main Street Newport, New York.

Reception immediately following in the church hall.

3. One of the best ways to handle refreshments when you aren't sure how many will attend, is to ask each family to bring a snack to share. The parish could provide coffee, tea, and cold beverages. A large wedding cake could also be ordered.
4. The reception can take any form you wish. You may have music for dancing, decorations, or simply coffee and cake. You might like to invite people to bring their wedding albums and offer them the opportunity to share them with one another. You may invite the children of each couple to attend also.

Liturgy

The liturgy will vary according to the needs of your group and the local parish community. Some suggestions follow:

Introductory Rites

Before the start of the liturgy, the lector may add a few remarks to let those in attendance know what is about to happen.

We thank you for joining us to celebrate Sacrament of Matrimony. As a parish community, we have known one another in both good times and in bad and we have needed the faithful, supportive, and steadfast love of one another. Married couples are a sign of God's love for us. His Church. Through their lifelong devotion and caring for one another, we begin to understand and appreciate how overwhelming God's love is for each of us. Come, let us celebrate together.

Note: The married couples may either join the processional or be already seated in their usual places.

Opening Prayer

The prayer from the Mass of the Sunday could be used or other appropriate prayers may be selected from the Sacramentary.

Liturgy of the Word

The readings for the Sunday could be used as usual. At a special liturgical celebration, the readings suggested for the Wedding Rite may be used. These might include the following:

First Reading

Sirach 26:1-4, 16-18 (The gift of a really good wife.)

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 112:1-5, 8-9 (Happy the man who fears Yahweh.)

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1-8 (Love is the greatest gift.)

Gospel

Matthew 5:13 – 16 (Our light must shine before men so that seeing it, they may come to believe.)

Homily

The homily is usually based on the scriptural readings chosen. The homilist may wish to make reference to the married couples and their gifts they bring to the Church through their love for one another.

Renewal of Vows

Immediately after the homily, the vows are renewed. The presider may wish to invite the couples to stand in place or come forward.

My dear friends, you have come here to renew the vows you made to one another on your wedding day. When you first spoke them, you may have understood them in only a vague, intellectual way. Since that time you have lived these vows one day at a time and now you know the fullness of what the words only imply. You have experienced your love growing and deepening and have known God's love for you. We ask God to be with you now as you renew your commitment to one another.

The couples are called forward in the church or stand facing one another. They may light a candle if they wish as a sign of love they bring to one another and the world. The leader or priest guides them as they recite the renewal vows:

"I (name), renew with you (name), the vows I made on our wedding day. I promise to continue to love you from this day forward. I will love you through all our good times and difficult times, whether we are rich in this world or poor, whether we are sick or healthy. I will love you and be true to you as long as we both shall live."

Prayer of the Faithful

The Prayer of the Faithful may include the following:

- For our Holy Father, the pope, the bishops and clergy everywhere, that they may always guide us to grow in our love for one another
- For the leaders of our country, that they may listen to the needs of families and enable them to lead richer, fuller lives.
- For our parish community, that everyone who comes will feel welcome and find a home with us.
- For our married couples, that they may be faithful to their vows and that their love for one another will grow stronger each day
- For those who are preparing for marriage or who someday will be married, that they may use this time to explore more deeply the meaning of love and lifelong commitment in their lives.
- For the sick and dying of our parish family and all those who care for them, that they may experience God's love for them
- For all the special intentions of those here present which we now reflect on silently (pause)

The priest may add.

Father you have given us the witness of the love of married couples to teach us how much you love us and how we should love one another. We ask you to listen to our prayers and help us respond to your grace so that we may grow closer to you and to one another.

Blessing of the Couples

The leader or the priest extends his or her right hand and says:

May God bless you and watch over you and your family today and everyday. May you always know His presence with you, may you experience His arms around you and His heart reaching out to yours. May we all gather together again one day to celebrate with Him in paradise, never to leave His presence. Amen.

The couples could join in the procession from the Church at the close of the Mass and form a receiving line at the rear of the church hall or they may remain in their seats and leave as usual. If there is to be a reception after Mass, announce it from the pulpit, inviting everyone to attend.

Resources

Two excellent resources for planning liturgies are:

1. *Liturgy Training Program, Archdiocese of Chicago, 5947 North Manton Ave., Chicago, IL 60646*
2. *Together for Life by Fr Joseph M Champlin, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556*