

Fit for Mission?

Marriage

A Preparation Course
Course Presenter's Book

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With the collaboration of the Diocese of Lancaster's Marriage and Family Life Commission



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Contents



Preface for Course Presenters	7
Introduction	7
The Marriage Preparation Course	8
Guidelines for Leading the Course	9
Basic requirements to be Course Presenters	10
Meeting the needs of couples according to their faith development	10
Principles of Evangelisation for Marriage Preparation	13
Why do we need to evangelise some couples?	13
How do we evangelise couples?	14
The goals of evangelisation	15
The process of evangelisation	15
Principles of Catechesis for Marriage Preparation Plus	18
Couples we do not need to evangelise, but to catechise	18
How do we catechise couples?	18
The goals of catechesis	19
The process of catechesis	20
Tools for Evangelisation and Catechesis	24
General Notes – How to get Started	22
Some practical considerations	23
Preparing the room	24
Overview of sessions	25

Marriage Preparation Course

Session 1. Two become one

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome to our Marriage Preparation Course.
2. Getting to know each other
3. What has God got to do with our marriage?
4. What is marriage?
5. Closing words and homework.

Session 2. Love is...?

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome and recap of the last session.
2. How will being married be different?
3. What is love?
4. The fruits of love
5. Closing words and homework.

Session 3. Respect the differences

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome and recap of the last session.
2. Respect the differences between men and women.
3. Practical ways of respecting the differences
4. Sin and forgiveness
5. Closing words and homework.

Session 4. God's body talk

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

- 1. Welcome and recap of last week's session
- 2. Made in the image of God
- 3. What's wrong with contraception and IVF?
- 4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God?
- 5. Closing words and homework

Session 5. Jesus' helping hand.....

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

- 1. Welcome and recap of last week's session.....
- 2. Who do you say Jesus is?.....
- 3. What is a sacrament anyway?
- 4. How do we deal with change and suffering?.....
- 5. Closing words and homework.....

Session 6. Loving each other in Christ

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

- 6. Welcome and recap of last week's session.....
- 7. Promises before God and his Church
- 8. Marriages are made in prayer
- 9. Visit to the Church.....
- 10. Closing words and homework.....

Nuptial Blessing.....

Marriage Preparation Plus Course

Session 1. Two become one

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome to Marriage Preparation Plus.....
2. Getting to know each other
3. Whoever loves knows God
4. What is marriage?
5. Closing words and homework.....

Session 2. Love is...?

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome and recap of last week's session.....
2. How will being married be different?
3. What is love?
4. The fruits of love
5. Closing words and homework.....

Session 3. Respect the differences

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome and recap of last week's session.....
2. Respect the differences between men and women.....
3. Practical ways of respecting the differences
4. Sin and forgiveness
5. Closing words and homework.....

Session 4. God's body talk

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

1. Welcome and recap of the last session.....
2. Made in the image of God.....
3. What's wrong with contraception and IVF?.....

- 4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God?
- 5. Closing words and homework.

Session 5. Jesus' helping hand.

Preparation before the session

Session Outline

- 1. Welcome and recap of the last session.
- 2. Who do you say Jesus is?
- 3. What is a sacrament anyway?
- 4. How do we deal with change and suffering?
- 5. Closing words and homework.

Session 6. Loving each other in Christ

Preparation before the session:

Session Outline

- 1. Welcome and recap of last week's session.
- 2. Promises before God and his Church
- 3. Marriages are made in prayer
- 4. Liturgical meditation on the meaning of your marriage.
- 5. Closing words and homework.

Nuptial Blessing



Preface for Course Presenters

Introduction

Christianity is, first and foremost, a religion of joy. There was so much joy at the birth of the Church at Pentecost that people thought the first Christians were drunk! (Acts 2:15). What is the reason for our joy? There are many – joy at the goodness and pleasure of the created world, including our bodies; joy at the bounty and blessings of God; joy in the person of Jesus, his life, teaching, and resurrection from the dead; joy in our Christian life together, and the promise of eternal fulfilment in heaven; but most of all, joy in the knowledge and experience that God is a God of love.

One of the most important occasions of joy in the life of the Church – which brings all of these other joys together – is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage. Is it any wonder that marriage is one of the most powerful and ancient images of God's love for humanity in the Bible?

For too long we have forgotten this truth by allowing our discussion and treatment of the institution of marriage in the Church – and wider society – to be dominated by a sense of crisis, verging on panic. This is not to downplay the pain and trauma caused by the high rate of divorce – as high among Catholics as the general population – or by the high incidence of infidelity, or spousal abuse.

However, part of the problem with 'marriage' is that most people – deep down – expect it to fail, as if the vows of fidelity and permanence are beyond 'ordinary' men and women, requiring super-human commitment and virtues.

The message of this Catholic preparation course for marriage is threefold:

- First and foremost, the Catholic approach to marriage cannot be a list of prohibitions – particularly about sex – but is a celebration of the joy of married love. However, because the Church takes marriage and sexual love so seriously, there must be a clear understanding and observance of Catholic sexual ethics. To be clear, the joy of married love is the fruit of certain conditions being fulfilled which arise from the very nature of marriage. These conditions we call sexual ethics, the moral order written into our very being as humans.

- Secondly, men and women are hard-wired by biology, psychology and spiritual nature to thrive in monogamous, faithful, life-long marriages that are open to the new life of children. We must reject as utterly false the ‘urban myth’ current in the media and society that human beings are naturally promiscuous and that adultery is only ‘human’. The degree of suffering and heartache among couples, their extended families and children is proof that this is a lie.
- Thirdly, that God the Trinity – the intimate community of divine persons in triune unity – has revealed his optimum plan for marriage in Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Catholic Church. The sacramental nature of Holy Matrimony is at the heart of God’s plan for wives and husbands. This plan reflects God’s nature as love. It includes the gift of divine love for the couple to realize God’s plan in their lives.

The Marriage Preparation Course

This *Course Presenter’s Book* provides the structure, content and activities for those delivering the course, drawing upon the richness of the Scriptures and the Church’s living teaching. The course content needs setting in the living context of the experience and wisdom of those who live the sacrament of matrimony, but priority must always be given to the doctrine of the Church, which is God’s gift to humanity for its happiness. While the experience of married couples is important to illustrate the Church’s teaching, a couple’s opinions or experience must never take priority over the Church’s teaching.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that marriage preparation courses must be a ‘journey of re-discovery’, that distinguishes between what ‘everyone else is doing, and what our own being intimately tells us’. As stated earlier, men and women are hard-wired to live faithful, life-long, monogamous marriages. The revelation of God about marriage does not contradict the nature of human beings created by him, but further confirms and gives it a deeper meaning. When this marriage preparation course works at its best it will help young couples re-discover truths about love that they already sense and know deep down.

These preparatory courses for marriage must be a journey of re-discovery. They must help us learn anew what our being tells us. They must help couples reach the true decision of marriage in accordance with the Creator and Redeemer. (Benedict XVI, 24 July 2007)

I would like to thank all the members of the Marriage and Family Life Commission – couples and clergy – for the commitment and hard-work that has been so evident in our collaboration in producing *Fit for Mission? Marriage*. One of the strengths of this course is that has drawn on the practical experience and insight of married couples and clergy and laity experienced in delivering marriage preparation courses. I would also like to thank my own team for their assistance in developing this new addition to the *Fit for Mission?* series.

✚ *Patrick O’Donoghue*



Guidelines for leading the course

Before presenting the first session it is important that the Course Presenters have a clear understanding of the overall goals of this Catholic marriage preparation course. The four goals are:

1. The couple will be able to describe – appropriate to their stage of faith development – the Catholic doctrine of marriage and sexual ethics.
2. The couple will be fully prepared to receive the Sacrament of Marriage; this includes two elements:
 - They will be able to describe the significance of the different aspects of the Nuptial Mass or Marriage Service.
 - They will be able to describe how to live out the Sacrament of Marriage in their life together.
3. The couple will begin to feel at ease in the Church and begin to be confident about their roles in the marriage service.
4. The couple will be given the opportunity to develop skills that will help them maintain and deepen their relationship.

In view of these goals, it is important that Course Presenters consider the following two aspects contained in the following sections:

- basic requirements to be Course Presenters, and
- presenting the course to meet the needs of couples according to their faith development.

Basic requirements to be Course Presenters

For the success of this course it is essential that Course Presenters – clergy and laity – accept and are convinced by the full teaching of the Church concerning marriage and sexual ethics. Failure in this regard would be a huge disservice to the Church and to the couples in our pastoral care. The most convincing lesson that these young couples will receive is the enthusiastic and realistic living out of the truth of Catholic faith by experienced husbands and wives.

Observance of the following requirements is expected of Course Presenters, whether clergy or laity:

- Acceptance of the full teaching of the Church concerning marriage and Catholic sexual ethics.
- Full consciousness of the fact that they are teaching the Faith of the Church, in the name of the Church. It is never appropriate or acceptable to present personal opinions that are contrary to doctrine as the teachings of the Church. Neither is it helpful or acceptable to express any personal doubts or criticisms of Church teaching, particularly with regard to contraception.
- Willingness to share experience. Participants on the course will benefit from a realistic account of the difficulties and joys of fully living out the Catholic understanding of married love.
- Sensitivity. It is essential that Course Presenters are not critical or judgmental about the life-style of the couples attending the course. However, we must ourselves be confident and clear about the moral teaching of the Church. If we don't have the courage of our convictions, why should new couples take them seriously?

In addition, leading a course can be daunting if you have never done anything like this before. Some experience of how to train, perhaps by working alongside an experienced person or through attending a 'train the trainer' event, should be completed.

Meeting the needs of couples according to their faith development

The modern identity of Roman Catholics is complex, involving different levels of adherence and involvement in the life of the Church and parish community:

I think the first thing to acknowledge here is that nowadays people use the word 'Catholic' in many different ways. Some identify themselves as being Catholic through a grandparent or going to a Catholic school. Others identify themselves as being Catholic because they were baptised in the local Catholic Church and attend family christenings, weddings and funerals. There are also those men and women who occasionally attend Mass at Christmas and/or Easter...

... Our fundamental identity as the Catholic Church is to be inclusive not exclusive. This is why we welcome all people who turn up at our presbytery doors, attend our liturgies, or meet the criteria for admission to our schools. However, this does not mean that everyone who has some type of relationship with the Catholic Church fully belongs to the Catholic Church.

(Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, *Fit for Mission? Church*, p.35)

The basic fact of life in the Church's provision of marriage is that the majority of couples presenting themselves for marriage preparation are non-practising and, more often than not, mixed – that is, the other partner is either a non-practising member of another Christian Church or ecclesial community, or has no religious background.

These couples often have little or no knowledge of the faith or experience of the Church and their motives for wanting a 'church wedding' can be varied and complex.

In these cases, the fundamental approach of the *Marriage Preparation Course* is one of evangelisation.

Evangelisation is the proclamation of the gospel. The evangelist's purpose is 'to touch the hearts of the hearers and turn them to God'. Evangelists trust that their word and example will, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, move others to a first act of faith'...First and foremost, evangelisation is motivated by love for those who do not yet know Christ, 'recognising that such persons are lacking a tremendous benefit in this world: to know the true face of God and the friendship of Jesus Christ, God-with-us'...

(*Fit for Mission? Schools*, p. 27)

We have therefore developed two different courses: *Marriage Preparation* and *Marriage Preparation Plus*, both of which are contained in this *Course Presenter's Book*. There are separate *Couple's Books* for each course.

The *Marriage Preparation Course* is designed to meet the specific needs of those couples with an inactive faith and so assumes little or no knowledge of the Faith.

The *Marriage Preparation Plus Course* has been developed for those couples presenting themselves for marriage preparation who are practising Catholics, and/or where one partner is a practising member of another Christian church or ecclesial community, and they have an active faith and spirituality. The *Marriage Preparation Plus Course*, therefore, assumes knowledge of the faith and a living relationship with Christ. In these cases, the fundamental approach of the course is one of catechesis.

Catechesis is the process by which the faith of believers is nourished and educated. ...It may be described as 'a dialogue of believers'. Its purpose is to help them towards a greater maturity of faith, especially in the way of understanding... 'To catechise is to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfilment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and the signs worked by him'. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 426).

(*Fit for Mission? Schools*, p. 27)

The descriptions *Marriage Preparation Course* and *Marriage Preparation Plus Course* have been chosen to avoid any sense of judgementalism or inferiority. However, both groups have very different needs which cannot be combined without doing a disservice to both. The language and concepts of the *Marriage Preparation Course* would be too simple and undemanding for couples with an active faith, while the language and concepts of the *Marriage Preparation Plus Course*, could be incomprehensible and alienating for couples with an inactive faith. This is just as it would be unreasonable to expect people who have been learning French for ten years to have the best learning and development experience in a class with beginners.

In order to discern which course would best suit couples attending marriage preparation it is necessary that Course Presenters have individual meetings with each couple to ascertain their needs.



Principles of Evangelisation for Marriage Preparation

Why do we need to evangelise some couples?

We cannot afford to be under any illusions about the faith background of many of the couples who present themselves for marriage preparation. If we fail to understand where they are coming from religiously, intellectually and emotionally, our *Marriage Preparation Course* will contain assumptions, concepts and language that will be unintelligible, easily misunderstood and alienating. To pretend that some couples are Catholics fully in communion with the Church when they are obviously not, is a disservice to the couple and a disservice to the truth entrusted to us by God.

The reality is that many of the couples who seek marriage in the Church are non-believers or are religiously indifferent. *The General Directory for Catechesis* [GDC] describes the situation as follows:

...entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel...[they] live in a religious context in which Christian points of reference are perceived purely exteriorly.

(GDC 58)

Though couples present themselves for marriage in the Catholic Church this does not mean we can presume that they believe the Faith of the Church or have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. In situations where the faith is inactive, what is needed is the much heralded New Evangelisation, which is, simply put, missionary activity aimed at non-believers and the religiously indifferent. New Evangelisation in the context of marriage preparation means proclaiming the Gospel about God's meaning and purpose for marriage, and to call the couple to conversion.

This makes the *Marriage Preparation Course* a missionary encounter. What, in practise, does this mean?

... the primordial mission of the Church is to proclaim God and to be his witness before the world. This involves making known the true face of God and his loving plan of salvation for man, as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

(GDC 23)

Therefore, for our *Marriage Preparation Course* to be missionary it needs:

- To proclaim God and for us to be his witnesses before the couples.
- To make known the true face of God in love and marriage, and challenge any false notions couples may have about God, love and marriage, including domestic abuse, contraception and divorce.
- To help couples see that God's plan for marriage – deeply personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to fertility – is not something imposed from outside but is already implicit in their love for each other. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1643).

How do we evangelise couples?

Jesus set out what he expects from his disciples in all types of evangelisation in what is known as Jesus' missionary mandate (*GDC* 34). A mandate is a command given by someone in authority which has the force of law. Jesus' missionary mandate to us as evangelists on the marriage preparation course is, therefore, not optional or open to re-interpretation but is mandatory for priests and laity, no matter how challenging or difficult.

Non-practicing couples have the right to learn what God has revealed about the meaning and purpose of their marriage. We do not have the right to deny them the full truth, including the Church's teaching on openness to life and the wrongfulness of contraception because we may find it difficult or embarrassing to talk about such things.

We must be clear here: we don't insist on teaching the full truth about marriage out of a motive to enforce blind obedience to Church teaching, but because we believe that God's meaning and purpose for marriage gives couples the best chance of being loving husbands and wives, and for their love to grow and flourish.

First, let's see what Jesus tells us about evangelisation:

Go into all the world; and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. (Mark 16:15)

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:48)

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Love one another. (John 15:12)

The goals of evangelisation

From these New Testament passages we can draw the following principles of evangelisation (cf. *GDC* 46):

Proclamation and witness: We must seek to proclaim the full meaning God has given to marriage (*CCC* 1602), as revealed in Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. As Jesus commands us, we must be witnesses to the truth of marriage in how we live our own marriage and the way we talk about marriage.

Teaching the Word and Sacrament: We must seek to teach couples about marriage in ways that respect the Word of God and the sacrament of marriage; and that also respect the couple, their intellectual, emotional and religious background, and their personal needs.

Personal change and love of neighbour: We must seek to encourage conversion in both the couples and ourselves to the full meaning God has given marriage. The ultimate purpose of the *Marriage Preparation Course* is to foster a deeper awareness and commitment to love between husband and wife, which can only be fully realised through participation in the life and love of the Holy Trinity through the grace of Jesus.

These three principles of evangelisation must inform the content and structure of the *Marriage Preparation Course*.

The process of evangelisation

We do not need to invent a methodology for evangelisation in our *Marriage Preparation Course*, but rather discover in Scripture the methodology used by God to evangelise and catechise his people. The Old Testament shows us that God is understood as the creative and insightful teacher of Israel, who transforms the events in the life of his people into lessons of wisdom. (*Fit for Mission? Schools*, p.22).

Our role as evangelists and catechists is to enable couples to encounter the God of love in a way that invites them to respond to that love.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Simply put, our goal for a couple participating in the *Marriage Preparation Course* is for them to be able to make a whole-hearted response of love to God and to his commands. However, if that is not possible, at the very least we should hope that the couple will begin to see the connection between their experience of love and the God of love, and have a deeper appreciation of the meaning and purpose of marriage, including sexual love.

How do we enable couples to encounter the God of love in a way that invites them to make the whole-hearted response of love, love of God and love of the commands of God?

First, if we think that such a goal is unrealistic, too ambitious, or impossible because of the depth of non-belief or religious indifference we have found in many couples, then we are defeated before we start! It is essential that the Presenters of the course are convinced about the truth of God's plan for marriage and the joys it brings – and are confident that God can bring about conversion in the most unexpected ways.

Once we are convinced that this is a realistic goal, then we can begin to apply the following methods used by God to invite the response of love:

1. Reach out and welcome

The Old Testament and New Testament give testimony to God's method of going out to people and welcoming them into a relationship with him. God adapts himself to the culture and stage of development of Israel, based on knowing and understanding the conditions in which he finds individuals. Therefore, in the marriage preparation course:

- We must adapt the style of teaching and language of the Faith to the culture and stage of faith development of the couple.

2. Proclaim and educate

The Lord teaches Israel through words and deeds, symbols and liturgy, about the meaning and purpose of a fully human life. He expects Israel to adopt his ways and model her behaviour on the divine attitude of love, kindness and faithfulness. Therefore, in the *Marriage Preparation Course*:

- We must proclaim the fullness the Church's teaching on marriage in a way that conveys the fact that receiving the sacrament of marriage also carries the expectation that the couple will adopt the meaning and purpose God has given marriage.

3. Call and invite to belong

The Gospels make clear that at the heart of Jesus' method of teaching was his personal call to each individual to repentance, conversion and membership of his community, the Church. Dialogue and questioning were his preferred way of calling each person, exemplified by his common question, 'What do you think?' This question shows a real interest and concern for the other person.

But Jesus didn't leave it there at the level of eliciting a personal opinion or judgment; he went to the next level of challenge and gave an explanation of the truth through the Word of God. Jesus did not follow the modern misguided approach that everyone's opinion was equally valid or equally truthful. He spoke with authority, with the expectation that everyone who listened to him with good will would achieve insight and recognise who he was.

Divine education is a process of questioning (Luke 24:13-24), explanation through the Word of God (24:25-28), insight [opening of eyes] (Luke 24:31) and liturgical recognition of Christ (Luke 24:31).
(*Fit for Mission? Schools*, p.24)

Therefore, in the *Marriage Preparation Course*:

- We must encourage an atmosphere of dialogue and questioning that asks couples what they genuinely think or feel. But we must not be afraid respectfully and politely to challenge any opinion that contradicts the teaching of the Church. The goal of our explanations, based on Scripture and the teaching of the Church, must not be to win an argument but to help the couple open their eyes to the truth. Every session of the course is an opportunity for the couple to hear the personal call of Christ and become members of his community, the Church.

Before each session with non-believing or religiously indifferent couples it is important to refresh yourselves about the method of evangelisation we are using in marriage preparation:

- Reach out and welcome,
- Proclaim and educate,
- Call and invite to belong.

Principles of Catechesis for Marriage Preparation Plus



Couples we do not need to evangelise, but to catechise

For those couples who present themselves for marriage preparation who have faith and participate in the Church, our joyful task is to help deepen their knowledge of the Church's Faith about the sacrament of marriage, and their relationship with Jesus.

However, one challenge facing Presenters working with practising Catholics may be that, due to poor catechesis, the couple have a confused or erroneous understanding of the Church's teaching, particularly regarding sexual morality, including contraception, sterilisation and IVF. Presenters must never convey any sense of blame because, in most cases, couples haven't been clearly taught the Church's teaching, at home, at school or from the pulpit. Again, it is only recently that the Church has begun to develop a positive and rich theology of the body to explain in greater depth and meaning why contraception and IVF undermine the dignity and purpose of marriage.

Pope John Paul II has given guidance about the purpose of marriage preparation for practicing couples:

Among the elements to be instilled in this journey of faith, which is similar to the Catechumenate, there must also be a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage, as well as preparation for taking an active and conscious part in the rites of the marriage liturgy.

(Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 66)

The whole of Christian life is a process of continuing catechesis, and significant moments in the life of the Christian, such as marriage, baptism of children, first confession and holy communion, confirmation, and funerals, are 'peak experiences' when we can gain a deeper knowledge of the Faith and a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. (cf. *GDC* 51).

How do we catechise couples?

The purpose of this *Marriage Preparation Plus Course* is to help practicing couples to deepen their relationship with each other through seeing marriage as their path to holiness, through learning to share their relationship with Jesus together. The following passages from Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict convey the purpose of catechesis:

At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father ...To catechise is to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfilment in that Person... Catechesis aims at putting people ...in communion... with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

(Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, 5)

Catechesis is about making available to minds and hearts the word of him who gave his life for us. In this way, catechesis causes to resound within the heart of every human being a unique call that is ceaselessly renewed: "Follow me".

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to French Bishops*, September 2008)

The fundamental task of catechesis with couples is to help them to know, to celebrate and to contemplate the mystery of Christ together, as husband and wife.

The goals of catechesis

The *General Directory for Catechesis* identifies six goals of catechesis that must be part of our *Marriage Preparation Plus Course*. (GDC, 85)

1. Promoting knowledge of the Faith: For couples who have a living faith, often the experience of love and the expectation of celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage cause them to want to know the God of love all the more. 'Who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed'. (GDC, 84). Catechesis through the *Marriage Preparation Plus Course* must lead the couple to gradually grasp the whole of God's meaning and purpose for marriage, through Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

2. Liturgical education: Hopefully a practicing Catholic couple will already be participating in the celebration of the Eucharist together. One of the goals of the course is to help the couple to share their Eucharistic faith together and to prepare for meeting Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, in the Sacrament of Marriage. The course will promote greater knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments and educate the couple 'for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds...as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life'. (GDC 85).

3. Moral formation: Most importantly, the goal of *Marriage Preparation Plus* is to transmit the attitude of God to the morality of marriage. We aim to encourage the couple to undertake a journey of 'interior transformation' together, as they learn to give themselves to each other totally. The course not only seeks to communicate the Word, but also the force of the Word lived by experienced married couples.

4. Deepening prayer life: For the sake of the couple, and any future children, it is vital that they learn to pray together, so that their family becomes a ‘domestic Church’. Also, it is important that the course is conducted in an atmosphere of prayer:

When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit. This climate is especially necessary when the catechumen and those to be catechized are confronted with the more demanding aspects of the Gospel and when they feel weak or when they discover the mysterious action of God in their lives. (GDC, 85)

5. Education for community life: *Marriage Preparation Plus* also aims to show the couple the role and responsibility of married couples within the life of the parish community and wider Church. For example, how they make sacramentally present Jesus’ faithfulness and self-giving love for the Church, his bride. It will also encourage them to have a place in their life together for single people, the poor and the elderly with openness and humility, so that they welcome others into the home they have built with their love.

6. Missionary initiation: The Presenters of the course must also seek to convince the couple of the importance of being present as married Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives. Now more than ever, society needs the witness of couples committed to unity, indissolubility, fidelity and openness to life. The Church needs Catholic couples to witness to the Gospel of life and, particularly, to show the world that there are realistic alternatives to contraception, abortion, IVF and divorce.

The process of catechesis

In the same way that we base our method of evangelisation on that used by God, we will also base our process of catechesis on God’s method, as revealed by Christ and the Church.

Personal and sensitive

Jesus taught and challenged people in order to deepen their relationship with him and the Father, in the Holy Spirit. His teaching was never abstract but always personal, sensitive to the particular needs of the person he was with. Therefore, in *Marriage Preparation Plus*:

- We must be sensitive to the fact that God has a unique relationship with each individual and that his grace is working in their lives. We must be discerning about the stage of the faith journey they are on.

Jesus first and last

The whole purpose of salvation history is fulfilled in the revelation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Nothing must put Jesus and his Gospel into second place in *Marriage Preparation Plus* – not our opinions, nor the opinions of the couple. Jesus must never be an afterthought, tagged on at the end. Therefore, in *Marriage Preparation Plus*:

- We must make sure that the teaching and person of Jesus is uppermost in each session, through Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and prayer, so that everyone has the opportunity – Presenters and couples – to deepen their relationship with Christ.

Love of the Church

The Old Testament and New Testament show us that the purpose of God's words and deeds was to shape a people to share in his life and love, and bring his justice, kindness and mercy to the world. The divine expression of God's love is the Holy Spirit, who is the life and guide of the Church, the People of God. Therefore, in *Marriage Preparation Plus*:

- We will encourage and foster love for the Church through our reverence for her teaching, liturgy, history and art, and cultivate respect and obedience to the Pope, the successor of Peter, and those Bishops in communion with him. At times you may be on the receiving end of criticism and anger aimed at the Church. It's best not to take this personally, but instead try to answer any misunderstanding with kindness and patience.

Seeing the holy

The Old Testament and New Testament witness to the transformation that is brought about in individuals through encountering the presence and power of God. The Father gives us his Word in nature and Scripture, Jesus has given the Church the sacraments to enable us to encounter his presence and power, and the Holy Spirit gives each one of us charisms. Therefore, in *Marriage Preparation Plus*:

- We will promote understanding and sensitivity to the words and signs that convey the power and presence of God through the sacraments, and deepen the couple's awareness of our need for grace, the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to live the vocation to married life.

Before each session with practising couples it is important to refresh yourselves about the method of catechesis we are using in *Marriage Preparation Plus*:

- Personal and sensitive
- Jesus first and last
- Love of the Church
- Seeing the holy

Tools for Evangelisation and Catechesis



The tools for evangelisation and catechesis are the same for *Marriage Preparation* and *Marriage Preparation Plus*, but are used differently, according to the two distinct processes for non-believing and believing couples.

The sessions for both marriage preparation courses will provide you with all the materials that you need, but it is necessary to understand why the principal sources of teaching material is the Word of God contained in Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Too often courses for couples have given over-emphasis to the personal experience and opinions of the Presenters and couples, and not enough attention to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church.

The danger in focusing on experience out of a concern to be ‘interesting’ and ‘relevant’ is that it ignores the fact that experience is not something ‘neutral’. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it, ‘experience detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair’. (World Youth Day, 2008).

The major threats to marriage come from immoral behaviour, such as contraception or divorce, that have become accepted by most people as normal and acceptable, often due to their unquestioned promotion by the media and government agencies.

- It is not right to say “sex before marriage is recommended because it is essential that the couple learn if they’re sexually ‘compatible’”.
- It is not right to say “the use of contraception or IVF is up to the conscience of the couple” because people forget or ignore the fact that conscience can be ill-informed or erroneous through habitual sin.
- It is not right to say “when discussing long-term problems and difficulties in marriage sometimes divorce is in the best interests of the children”.
- It is not right to say “any type of sexual behaviour is permissible in a marriage if both partners consent”.

The premise underpinning this course is that the Church’s teaching is not just one opinion among many equally valid opinions, but the absolute and liberating Word of God about marriage.

Presenters of both marriage preparation courses are involved in a vital aspect of the ministry of the Word in the Church. As such, it is encouraging to remember that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the principal agent of the ministry of the Word, the one through whom “the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church—and through her in the world”. (*GDC* 50).



General Notes - How to get Started

Some practical considerations

The *Marriage Preparation Course* and *Marriage Preparation Plus Course* have 6 sessions each and each session has been designed to last about one and a half hours. However, this is just a standard recommendation that should not constrain you from running your course to a different time scale, and adapting the material to the needs of your couples. Furthermore, once you are familiar with both courses you may want to ‘pick and mix’ the contents depending on the level of engagement of the group.

Initial pre-course meeting with couples

When couples present themselves for marriage preparation there should first be a preliminary meeting between the couple and the priest and/or deacon to conduct the pre-nuptial enquiry. During this meeting the priest and/or deacon can make a judgement on which course would best suit the couple depending on their inactivity or activity in the faith. It is important to determine which is the most appropriate course for them – *Marriage Preparation* or *Marriage Preparation Plus* – and agree the dates on which they will attend.

Materials

This *Course Presenter’s Book* contains both courses, with guidance about presenting the sessions. There are separate *Couple’s Books* for those attending either of the courses. These contain the session aim, objectives, key features, activities and a summary of the key points. Also, in the material for couples there is an introductory message to couples and course overview. You may want to give them this material prior to starting the course, perhaps at the pre-nuptial enquiry meeting mentioned above.

Activities

The activities included in each session have been designed to encourage the couples to engage with the material and apply the more formal input to their personal experience. It is important that the Presenters adapt these sessions to suit the couples where necessary – for example some may not be comfortable with reading from the handouts and jotting down ideas, in which case your approach would need to include less individual work by couples.

Role of the Presenter

It is also important that as Presenters you familiarize yourself with the content and activities and think what you can add from your understanding of Church teaching and personal experiences to bring the sessions to life. The idea is not to hold yourselves up as a model of perfection, but rather to show that your marriage is a “work in progress” and that success is possible (and joyful and wonderful) but that it requires a continual renewal of effort and commitment.

Preparing the room

Think about the surroundings.

- Is the room temperature comfortable?
- Is the atmosphere suitable for prayer? – e.g.: presence of Cross, icon, candle.
- Are there sufficient chairs?
- Do you have/want to use a table? – This can make the setting more formal. Table or not, couples may need means to take notes
- Is the furniture arranged in the best way? – Subject to the constraints of your room a circular arrangement, so that couples can sit together and see other couples, is often recommended.
- How will you limit distractions and noise? – Putting up a simple sign on the door and turning off any phone in the room can be helpful.
- How will you ensure you meet the special needs, if any, of the couples – e.g. access; requirement for larger print?
- Have you available pens and/or pencils in case couples wish to make notes?
- Do you have a flipchart? – This can be helpful to capture key ideas where couples are sharing or to illustrate points during your input. Occasionally, use of a flipchart will be specifically mentioned. If you do not have a flipchart consider alternatives.
- Occasionally one of the couple may not attend or be late. Think about how you will approach activities in this situation. Normally it will be fine for the individual to work alone; however, for certain activities you may like to ask the individual if they would like to work with you.

Overview of sessions

The aim, objectives and key features for each session are set out below.

Session 1. Two become one
Aim: To introduce the course and make connections between the couple's experience of love and the Church's teaching on love.
Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe the connection between their love and the God of love.• Explain God's meaning and purpose for marriage.• Start to implement a plan to deepen the foundations of their love for each other.
Key Features: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your experience: How did you fall in love? What is it like being in love? How is love changing your lives?• God is love: God's love for humanity in the Old Testament.• What is marriage? Consent to total, unconditional self-giving which needs personal unity, indissolubility, fidelity and openness to life.
Session 2. Love is...?
Aim: To deepen the couples' understanding of love and how to increase their love.
Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State the Christian understanding of love.• Discuss the opportunities and challenges of marriage.• Accept the benefits to marriage of leading a virtuous life.• Describe how the deadly sins endanger marriage.• Apply practical strategies for leading a virtuous life.
Key Features: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is love? Jesus and love. Affection, erotic love, friendship, self-giving love.• St Paul's 'Love is never...' and its mirror, 'Love is...'• The secrets to a happy marriage: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.• The threats to a happy marriage: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth.

Session 3. Respect the differences

Aim: To establish practical ways of positively engaging with the differences between man and woman and explore how these can be the source of marriage's strength and richness, but also a source of misunderstanding, conflict and hurt.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain that God made males and females to complement and complete each other.
- Use effective strategies for speaking and listening.
- Indicate ways of resolving conflicts.
- Accept the importance of forgiveness and what this means.

Key Features:

- The theology of the body about masculinity and femininity.
- How to listen effectively.
- How to speak positively.
- How to resolve conflicts.
- How to forgive.

Session 4. God's body talk

Aim: To appreciate that, being created by the God of love, our bodies reflect their origin in his loving purpose. This purpose informs what is the right and wrong use of our bodies.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love.
- State why contraception and IVF contradict the meaning of marital love.
- State why the marriage vows of unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life are vital to the success of a marriage.
- Explain why the Church advocates Natural Fertility Awareness.

Key Features:

- The 'nuptial significance' of maleness and femaleness.
- The law of self-gift and the necessary conditions for self-giving.
- How contraception and IVF are a lie.
- Why it is important that sexual love is open to life.
- Natural Fertility Awareness.

Session 5. Jesus' helping hand

Aim: To see how a proper understanding of who Jesus is helps us understand what happens when we receive the sacrament of marriage. To appreciate the importance of this sacrament in helping us face the difficult times in marriage.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain what a sacrament is and how sacraments help and support us through life.
- Highlight why marriage is a sacrament.
- Indicate their approaches to dealing with change.
- Discuss how they deal with suffering.
- Apply some practical actions to help with change and suffering.

Key Features:

- Sacraments: Jesus' power to heal and teach has been passed on through the sacraments.
- The nature of grace. Sharing the life and energy of God.
- Why do we need a sacrament to be married?
- Dealing with change.
- Coping with suffering.

Session 6. Loving each other in Christ

Aim: To appreciate the significance and meaning of the different parts of the wedding service and that marriage is made in prayer.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain that they confer the sacrament of marriage on each other, before the Church and sealed by God.
- State the significance of the different elements of the marriage liturgy.
- Explain the meaning of the symbols of marriage.
- Prepare for their own marriage service.
- Describe the importance of prayer.

Key Features:

- Liturgy as participation in the life of God.
- The different parts of the marriage liturgy.
- The marriage vows.
- The exact point at which they are married.
- Praying together.

Marriage Preparation Course

- Designed to meet the specific needs of those couples with an inactive faith.
- Assumes little or no knowledge of the Catholic faith.

Session 1 - Two become one

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to the *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Session 1 Two become one

Aim: To introduce the course and make connections between the couples' experience of love and the Church's teaching on love.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Describe the connection between their love and the God of love.
- Explain God's meaning and purpose for marriage.
- Start to implement a plan to deepen the foundations of their love for each other.

Key Features:

- Your experience: How did you fall in love? What is it like being in love? How is love changing your lives?
- God is love: God's love for humanity in the Old Testament.
- What is marriage? Consent to total, unconditional self-giving which needs personal unity, indissolubility, fidelity and openness to life.

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome (15 mins)	Brief introductions. Input: Overview of the course and 'Ground rules' for the course.
2. Getting to know each other (20 mins)	Activity: Reflecting on our own experience of love. Sharing by couples.
3. What has God got to do with our marriage? (20 mins)	Input: Introduction to the Bible. Activity: Making the link between God's love and us. Review of Bible passages and discussion covering input on God and love.
4. What is marriage? (30 minutes)	Activity: Quick 'opinion quiz'. Couples review statements about marriage followed by group discussion covering input on what the Catholic Church teaches about marriage.
5. Closing words and homework (5 mins)	Input: Prayer. Activity: Say prayer together.

1. Welcome to our Marriage Preparation Course

The purpose of this section is to create a relaxed atmosphere in which individuals understand about the course and feel engaged and willing to share.

Presenters introduce themselves

- If married, name spouse, how long you've been married, what you do for a living, how many children.
- If a priest or deacon, indicate roughly how many couples you have prepared, how many weddings, how many baptisms.
- Explain what you are expecting/hoping for from the programme.

Invite the couples to introduce themselves

- How long have they have known each other or have been going out together, and any other circumstances (such as children).
- What they expect/hope to get from attending the programme.

Overview

If they have not already received, or have forgotten to bring their *Couple's Books*, hand out copies of the course overview.

Key points: Go through the course overview material making the following points.

- There are 6 sessions each lasting about 1½ hours.
- There will be activities, but not to worry – they are not tests which you have to pass. There will also be discussions where you are free to share as much as you are comfortable with, you will not have to do anything you feel unable to.
- Anything of a personal nature that we share we agree to keep confidential within this group, unless otherwise agreed.
- Please switch off mobile phones, or keep them on silent.
- There is material for each session. These contain the key points from the session and the activities. You will be directed to the material when required during the session. The materials are yours to take away.

Turn to session 1 in the *Couples' Book*.

2. Getting to know each other

The purpose of this section is to start the couples thinking about their experience of love.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

1. We're all here because we know love is important, maybe the most important thing in our lives. So, let's start your marriage preparation by talking about love.
2. Please look at these questions, and talk about them in your couples for 5 minutes, then we'll come together to share.

Activity: Getting to know each other

1. Where did you first meet?
2. When did you know you were in love?
3. What does being in love feel like?
4. How have you changed each other's lives?
5. How do you know the other person loves you?

After 5 minutes come together and go round the group sharing your answers for approximately 10 minutes. Start with the married presenters.

Conclude the section by making the following points:

- Over these six sessions we're going to be talking about things you're already familiar with; we're going to look at what makes for good relationships.
- We're here to help you prepare for your marriage because the Catholic Church is on the side of love! We want your love for each other to grow stronger; we want your wedding to be a celebration of your love, and your marriage to bring you happiness and fulfilment throughout your lives together.
- Why is the Catholic Church so interested in love? If you asked us to explain in three words what do Catholics believe we'd tell you, 'God is love'. The love between a man and a woman is one of the aspects of our lives that brings us closest to God.

3. What has God got to do with our marriage?

The purpose of this section is to help increase the couples' understanding that God is a God of love and start to make the link between our love and God's love. There are many passages in the Bible which show the intense and surprising love of God which are used in this section.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- So, now you know that Catholics believe that ‘God is love’. Another question you could ask is, ‘How do you know God is love?’
- As Catholics we’re part of a community that traces its roots back 3,800 years to a couple who lived in Iraq called Abraham and Sarah. Over those 3,800 years people have had encounters with God which they wrote down in a book you have all heard about, the Bible, and passed on by word of mouth or through art, music and the way the Church does things.
- The Bible was written by real people, who lived in real places, about real experiences they had with God. It’s not make-believe, nor wishful thinking – and you wouldn’t make it up, even if parts can seem hard to believe.
- The reason we mention the Bible is because through it God shows us what he’s like, who he is and what he’s interested in. Over the 3,800 years we’ve known him, God has made it very clear that he’s interested in marriage, and how husbands and wives love each other and their children.
- If your reaction to hearing about the Bible is to automatically think, ‘What’s a load of nonsense’, we ask you to put aside your hostility and reservations for the time you are here and give us a fair hearing. We’re not trying to sell you something or brainwash you, but we are sharing something with you that’s important to us, and we ask for your patience.
- We’re going to look at some passages from the Bible about God and we want you to think about this question: What strikes you about this passage?

Allocate the passages among the couples, double-up passages as required (*Couple’s Book*, p5). Give couples 5 minutes to reflect and discuss together the passage(s) they have been allocated.

Bible passages about God

(A) The LORD says: Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people [Israel], and will have compassion on his suffering ones. But Israel said, “The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me”. Can a woman forget her baby at the breast; feel no pity for the child she has borne? Even if these were to forget, I shall not forget you. Look, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. (Isaiah 49:13-16)

(B) The LORD says: Therefore, I will now attract her [Israel], and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her...On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, “My husband”... And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord. (Hosea 2:14-20)

(C) The LORD says: I have loved you [Israel] with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers... Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. (Jeremiah 31:3, 13)

(D) The LORD says: You [Israel] grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant [marriage] with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine... I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric... You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen. (Ezekiel 16:7-13)

After about 5 minutes, invite the couples to share their thoughts about the Bible passage(s). Read out the passages one-by-one and ask couples to comment.

Key points: You will want to make the following points or underline points that the couples make:

- All the passages from the Bible are about God speaking to Israel, who, in the Bible, represents all human beings.
- God loves Israel with a passion! In the passage from Isaiah, he loves Israel with the total love of a parent. And in the other passages, he loves Israel with the passionate love of a lover, or of a husband for his wife.
- In all the passages God expresses his love in terms of total commitment, He will be totally faithful and expects Israel to be totally faithful in return and belong to Him. As it says throughout the Bible, Israel will be His people and He will be their God.
- God expresses His love in very physical terms; He is concerned with the material well-being of his people. Like a husband and wife, he wants the people he loves to have the things they need to enjoy life.
- God wants us to have fun and to enjoy life, which we see in the images of dancing crowds and merry making in the passage from Jeremiah. Throughout the Bible the image of the wedding is used to convey the happiness and fulfilment that God wants for the whole human race.
- God isn't afraid to express his love for humanity in erotic terms, as we see in the passage from Ezekiel. What do you think about this? Does it surprise you? Nowhere in the Bible does it say that sexual love is dirty, or sinful. The Bible is clear that sexual attraction and sexual feelings are good and an important dimension of love between a husband and

wife. Sex in itself is good, but, as you know, what people do with sex can be immoral and harmful.

- Often people have the wrong idea about God – it's common for people to think God is an unforgiving judge, or a humourless killjoy, or a puritan, who thinks sex is dirty, or a cruel tyrant, or a power-crazy puppet master who enjoys pulling our strings.
- We hope that the passages have shown you a more positive image of God, God the lover, and why we believe that 'God is love'. The passion, commitment and joy you find in loving each other gives you a special understanding, though a limited one, of God's love for each one of us.

4. What is marriage?

The purpose of this section is to explore the qualities of marriage.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- Given that God is a God of love, we're now going to look at what the Catholic Church teaches about marriage, which is based on what God has told us about the meaning and purpose He has given marriage.
- Turn to the questionnaire (Couple's Book, p6), asking them to fill it in together, then the group will go through the answers.

After about 10 minutes, come together as a group to discuss the answers, spend about 5 minutes discussing each question. Couples may or may not like to share their final answer, but should be encouraged to share their thoughts. Make sure that couples do mark the Church's answer in their books. The questionnaire has been designed to raise the four essential qualities of marriage – personal unity, indissolubility (no divorce), faithfulness or fidelity, and openness to fertility. You will want to make the following points when discussing the couples' answers; these points draw on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

What is Marriage? Questionnaire

1. Marriage should be about total mutual self-giving – this is best expressed through sex.

- ✓ This question is about the personal unity of marriage.
- ✓ The answer to this question is 'Strongly agree'. Sexual love is essential for the wellbeing of the marriage. (cf. CCC 1643-1644).
- ✓ Sex isn't just a biological act, but involves the innermost being of each person. Through sexual love husband and wife 'speak' the language of total self-gift, through which they give themselves to each other physically, psychologically, personally and spiritually.

- ✓ Good sexual love between husband and wife creates a personal closeness and union that is the foundation of their family. The Church calls this the deep personal union of marriage.
- ✓ To enjoy each other's bodies and to let our personal defences down completely, requires complete trust and understanding. This is only possible for a woman and a man who have committed themselves to one another until death, as husband and wife.
- ✓ Total giving is for life without conditions.

2. If a couple is having a rough time with each other it is better for them, and for their children, to get divorced.

- ✓ This question is about the indissolubility of marriage.
- ✓ The answer to this is 'Strongly disagree'. Divorce is not an option for Catholics who live up to their marriage vows. (cf.CCC 1626-1640).
- ✓ Jesus said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:5-6).
- ✓ When a man and woman give consent during the marriage ceremony to mutually give themselves to each other, they form a bond that is sealed by God himself. When the words of self-giving are consummated by the sexual act of self-giving, the marriage can never be dissolved, until death. This is not unrealistic or naïve because millions upon millions of Catholic couples have lived their marriages with this understanding. There is strength in getting married knowing you cannot get divorced, and also Christians believe that with Christ's example and help it is always possible to forgive each other. It might not be easy, but it is always possible.
- ✓ For sexual love to form such a close, personal union between husband and wife that it can be described as forming 'one heart and soul', marriage demands the forbidding of divorce, which is called indissolubility. (CCC 1643).
- ✓ It has been said that for children to be happy and fulfilled they need two things: to know that they are loved by their parents, and to know that their parents love each other and will never get divorced.
- ✓ The advantage of knowing that divorce is not an option is that when rough times happen the couple really work hard on finding ways of resolving problems.

3. If both partners agree, having sex with someone else occasionally can add spice to life without spoiling the marriage.

- ✓ This question is about faithfulness or fidelity in marriage.
- ✓ The answer is 'Strongly disagree'. Sexual love is exclusive to marriage. (cf. CCC 1646).
- ✓ By its nature, sexual love requires that it is exclusive to marriage.
- ✓ When you give yourself totally to your husband or wife, and accept the gift of the other, there is a body language within sexual love of total trust and commitment, and a promise of faithfulness. If you have sex with someone else, you are lying and spoiling (or seriously damaging/wounding) something very special/precious. You are lying to your husband or wife, and lying to the person with whom you're having sex.
- ✓ The anger, sense of betrayal and despair that occurs when a husband or wife discover their spouse has committed adultery is a true measure of the importance of faithfulness in sexual love. Adultery makes a lie of all the words and acts of love, and is experienced as the most hurtful and destructive rejection.
- ✓ Some people try to justify having sex with a stranger by saying that it was just sex and not love. But that's just a self-seeking excuse. The sexual act is never a purely biological act; it is always personal and deeply affects the person.
- ✓ Some of you may already have had sex – in later sessions we shall return again to why sex within marriage is different and hope that when you understand this you will understand why marriage should be the only place in which sex takes place.

4. It is OK to get married and agree never to have children.

- ✓ This question is about the couple being open to fertility.
- ✓ The answer to this question is 'Strongly disagree'. If a couple get married but have no intention of having children there is no marriage. The intention not to have children invalidates the marriage. (cf. CCC 1652).
- ✓ The basic purpose of sexual love is the procreation of children, and the creation of a loving and stable family for their wellbeing and education. This seems so obvious as not to need stating, however, nowadays, there is the mistaken notion that the major purpose of sex is the physical pleasure and satisfaction of the couple, and children are an optional extra or life-style choice. This shows a complete misunderstanding about marriage and an impoverished attitude to sexual love.
- ✓ The procreation of children is so important to the meaning and purpose of marriage that to totally reject having children means there is no marriage.

- ✓ God says to men and women, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28).
- ✓ If a couple intend to have children, but due to infertility they cannot conceive children, then their intention is enough to make it a marriage as real and true as one that has children. (CCC 1654).

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to encourage the couples in prayer.

This may be difficult to transmit to couples because prayer may be completely alien to them, but we have to try. The purpose of this course is to give them knowledge about the Church’s teaching but it also aims to give them a chance of forming a relationship with Jesus. To do this we need to encourage them to pray together or on their own. The home work each week will try to encourage them to pray.

Direct the couples to the prayer in the in the *Couples’s Book*, p.7. You may also like to have the prayer copied onto small laminated cards for the couples.

Key points: When introducing this last section you may want to make the following points:

- Each one of us has made a commitment to help you prepare for your marriage. We do this free of charge.
- All that we ask is that you turn up to each session, that you remain open, patient and receptive to what is being said, even if you don’t agree, understand or believe them at this point, and that you do a short piece of ‘homework’ before each session.
- In your *Couples’s Book*, (p.7) is a prayer which has been written for engaged couples, which you can pray together and/ or on your own.
- We want you to pray it every day, maybe first thing in the morning, or last thing at night. Read it slowly, thinking about the words.
- Maybe you pray every day, or maybe you haven’t prayed since you were young.
- What is prayer? Prayer is keeping God company. It’s a relationship that changes; sometimes prayer is like a talk between a father/mother and child, or between a teacher and student, or between the creator of the universe and his creature. Sometimes prayer is like a talk between lovers, and sometimes it feels like talking into emptiness. Sometimes prayer is a petition or expresses a felt need. However you experience prayer, we ask you to keep going – just once a day.

- Read out the prayer with them:

Lord God, the source of all love, your loving plan has brought us together. As we prepare for the sacrament of marriage, strengthen our hearts, so that we will keep faith with each other, please you in all things, and so come to the happiness of our wedding day. Amen.

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.

Session 2 - Love is...?

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Aim: Deepen the couple's understanding of love and how to increase their love.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- State the Christian understanding of love.
- Discuss the opportunities and challenges of marriage.
- Accept the benefits to marriage of leading a virtuous life.
- Describe the dangers of the deadly sins to marriage.
- Apply practical strategies for leading a virtuous life.

Key Features:

- What is love? Jesus and love. Affection, erotic love, affection friendship, self-giving love.
- St Paul's 'Love is never...' and its mirror, 'Love is....'
- The secrets to a happy marriage: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.
- The threats to a happy marriage: pride, avarice, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth.

Session 2 Love is...?

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session	Welcome back, ask if any questions. Activity: Recap the 4 essential qualities of marriage. Input: Brief overview of session.
2. How will being married be different? (20 mins)	Activity: Reflecting on sentences on the difference marriage may make. Followed by sharing by couples.
3. What is love? (25 mins)	Activity: Review examples to determine which are love. Input: On the four different types of love.
4. The fruits of love (30 mins)	Input: Behaviours that help and hinder love, virtues and vices. Activity: Match the virtue or vice to its definition. Discussion: Sharing on how the virtues and vices have affected our lives.
5. Closing words and homework (5 mins)	Input: St Paul's description of love.

1. Welcome and re-cap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Welcome couples back to the course. Ask if anyone has any questions arising since you last met. Explain that to start you are going to complete a quick recap.

Key Points: you will want to make the following points:

- Last time you filled in a questionnaire called, “What is marriage?” which we used to discuss the four essential qualities of marriage. Let’s see if, as a group, we can name the four elements.
- Listen to these four definitions; please name the quality of marriage it describes:
 - What is the essential quality of marriage when husband and wife share themselves totally with each other through sexual love? (Answer for presenter = **Personal unity**.)
 - What is the essential quality of marriage by which husband and wife know that they will never divorce? (Answer for presenter = **Indissolubility**.)
What is the essential quality of marriage which promises total, exclusive commitment? (Answer for presenter = **Faithfulness**.)
 - What is the essential quality of marriage which to reject means there is no marriage? (Answer for presenter = **Openness to fertility**.)

Objectives of today’s session

Key points: Make the following points:

- Today, bearing in mind the qualities we just recapped, we’re going to look at how we think being married will be different, particularly different from living together.
- We’re going to look more closely at what love is, particularly the love between wife and husband.
- And we’re going to talk about the secrets of a happy marriage and how to protect each other from the threats to a happy marriage.

2. How will being married be different?

The purpose of this section is to help the couples talk about how being married and living the four essential qualities of marriage will be different.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- The four questions we looked at in the recap showed us the four essential qualities of marriage – personal unity, indissolubility (no divorce), faithfulness or fidelity, and openness to fertility.
- Now, we are going to look at how being married and living these four essential qualities of marriage will be different.

Direct couples to the activity, “How will being married be different? (*Couple’s Book*, p.8) They should think about which answers from other couples apply to them, are there any ‘differences’ missing? At the end they will have a brief opportunity to share, if they would like.

How will being married be different?

- It is great to share everything: our house, our daily lives, ourselves.
- It is wonderful to have that commitment both ways! Till death do us part.
- It’s great not having to live with the anxiety that the other might decide it’s not working anymore and leave.
- It’s a relief to be able to share everything about myself with someone I completely trust.
- It provides the right environment for bringing up our children.
- Other people think of us and treat us differently as a married couple.
- The grace that God gives through marriage helps us to stay together through the difficult times and enjoy the good times even more deeply.
- It is the best possible way to express our love for each other.
- Having the blessing of the Church and all our friends and family on our love is very powerful.

After about 10 minutes, come together as a group. Ask the couples if they had anything they would like to share with the other couples – perhaps a difference that could be useful for other couples to think about as well. Allow about 10 minutes for sharing.

Key points: You may want to bring up the following points, if they don’t come up:

- The promise to stay together forever means that the fear that one of you might ‘stray’ or ‘play away’ disappears. The one thing that can complicate a couple’s sexual relationship is anxiety about ‘performance’. Being able to relax and trust each other is the secret to true sexual love – until your 90!

- Your best friend should be your husband or wife, because in a good marriage you get so close that you can talk about anything, without fearing that the other will blow up or walk out.
- The reason why 1 in 3 marriages end in divorce is because one or both partners think 'I'll stay so long as it suits me. If it doesn't work out I'm off!' This means that the moment things get tough, like sickness, or unemployment, or when someone comes along that they fancy, that's the end of the marriage.
- When you make your marriage vows, you've both got to mean them totally or else you're deceiving each other.
- One of the best ways of looking at marriage is that you're a team – not warring parties who have signed a peace treaty. As you know, a team works when each member is loyal to the team, puts the interests of the team before their own purely personal interests, and has a goal firmly in sight. An important goal of marriage is having children. If you don't like the idea of having children, or think they're a nuisance that get in the way of having fun, then you're not getting the whole point of team marriage.

3. What is love?

The purpose of this section is to help the couples explore the different aspects of love, to help them see that they need all four types of love to have happy marriages – affection, friendship, erotic love, and self-giving love. However, for this activity to work don't tell them that there are four types of love; you reveal this at the end if they haven't worked it out.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- In this activity we want each couple to look at four examples and decide together which ones best describe what love is. Then we'll come together and discuss our decisions.

What is Love?

1. Mary was very fond of John. She liked the way he laughed so much at silly things, that the tears ran down his face and the way he wiggled his feet in the air and rolled around the settee. For days afterwards it brought a smile to her face remembering his uncontrolled laughing.
2. Bill really enjoyed playing tennis with Julia, because she was competitive and was helping him improve his service. Best of all, Bill enjoyed going to the pub afterwards with Julia and just talking about things.
3. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love-making is sweeter than wine; delicate is the fragrance of your perfume, your name is an oil poured out.

4. Alice thought Tom very brave but worried that after the operation he would never be well again. The doctors said he could live a normal life with one kidney, and it was a million-to-one chance that he was a match for a kidney transplant to his brother, but still... Tom said he had to give his brother a chance to live, even if they hadn't got on for years.

After about 10 minutes, come together as a group. Ask the following questions:

- Which descriptions best describe love and why do you think so?
- Did you find it easy to decide which described love?

Key points: Make the following points:

- All four examples describe love. Unfortunately English only has one word for love – 'Love'. Other languages have many words to describe the different types of love – like Eskimos who have more than one word for 'snow.'
- The Greeks had four words for four different types of love – affection (*storge*), friendship (*philia*), erotic love (eros), and self-giving love (agape).

1. Which example describes affection? (The answer is number 1).

- The best example of affection is the love between a parent and child. The parent takes delight in the character and behaviour of the child, his or her little habits and personality traits.
- But affection isn't limited to the parent-child relationship, and is very important in a marriage. Affection cherishes and appreciates the uniqueness of the other, makes allowances for the irritating things they do, and makes the other feel safe and wanted.

2. Which example describes self-giving love? (The answer is number 4.)

- Self-giving love is best seen in people who do something at great personal cost to themselves for no apparent reward. As Jesus said, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'. (John 15:13). Self-giving love puts the needs of the other before your own needs.
- Though you might not have to give your life or your kidney for your husband or wife, there will come times in a marriage when you have the choice to sacrifice your own needs or happiness for the needs and happiness of the other. If you make this sacrifice you'll know that you love them more than you love yourself.
- The greatest example of self-giving love is Jesus' life and death on the Cross to show us how much God loves us, to the point of giving his life for us.

3. Which example describes erotic love? (This answer is number 3, which is from the Bible, from a book called, '*The Song of Songs*').

- Erotic love is unique to marriage. This might seem strange to say, because nowadays many people have sex before marriage and outside of marriage. However the experience of true erotic love is only fully realised in the context of the four essential qualities of marriage – deep personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life.
- Sex isn't just about physical stimulation and pleasure, though these are important and good things; sex is also about personal meaning – as an expression of tenderness, of fun, of comfort and excitement. The ultimate meaning of erotic love is conceiving a child, and knowing you're a mother and a father for the first time.
- We all know about the problem and tragedy of meaningless sex – one night stands, men or women who live with someone until 'something better turns up', abusive, loveless sex. Such misuse of sexual love does great damage to men and women, often leaving them feeling 'used', 'worthless', 'spoiled goods', 'cheap', and can lead to unwanted pregnancies and abortions.
- What's the reason for these feelings of low self-esteem and depression after meaningless sex? As we said earlier, sex is not just a biological act but an act which deeply concerns the innermost being of each of the two persons involved.
- For sex to be truly erotic, psychologists tell us that the sexual act must be meaningful to us on a personal level – we must feel valued, appreciated, respected and recognized as a person. This level of meaning can only be achieved through the permanence, exclusiveness and generosity of marriage.
- In this society that so values sexual freedom and sexual pleasure, it is an eye-opener to realise that only complete and satisfying erotic love can be achieved by couples who live by the Catholic understanding of marriage.

4. Finally, which example describes the love of friendship? (The answer is number 2).

- Friendship is a form of love, a non-sexual type of love. There are different types of friendships – drinking buddies, mates, and best friends. We do fun things with our friends, have a laugh and share the same interests. We tend to form deep friendship with best friends, people we've known for a long time and share with on a deeply personal level.
- In this day and age, many people confuse deep friendship with sexual love, but you can really care about someone, and want to spend time with them, without wanting to have sex with them.

- It's important that husband and wife are best friends, that they have fun together, have a laugh and share interests. This doesn't mean that you can't have other friends; but the love of friendship stops couples drifting apart and becoming strangers.

As you've mostly probably guessed you need all four types of love to make your marriage work – affection, friendship, erotic love and self-giving love.

Three types of love are natural and familiar to us; we've all felt affection, friendship and erotic desire, but maybe not self-giving love, to the point of self-sacrifice.

We need God's help to make the major sacrifices of life, to help us overcome our natural self-centeredness and weakness. We call this help from God, 'grace', which means 'gift', and on your wedding day God will give you the gift of his help for your marriage. A gift you can use, and with use it will get stronger; or you can ignore it, and it will fade from your minds. It's up to you.

4. The fruits of love

The purpose of this section is to think about the types of behaviour which love leads to.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- In the following activity we are going to look at the behaviours which love produces and those behaviours which do not come from love.
- Another word for the positive behaviours which come from love is virtue. A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of herself or himself. Traditionally we talk about twelve 'fruits' which come from the Holy Spirit and the practise of which make our lives the best possible. These are: self-giving love (or charity), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.
- On the other hand, those behaviours which harm our relationships and which do not come from love are called, vices, or sins. Sin is against reason and truth because it ultimately undermines our life and leads to unhappiness and disappointment. Sin is a failure in genuine love for each other and for God. We traditionally talk about seven deadly sins, these are: pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth.
- In this activity we want each couple to look at descriptions in their activity book and match them to the name of the virtue or vice. If you have time you could start thinking which virtues you think are the most important and which vices are the worst. Then we'll come together and discuss our decisions. (*The answers are shown below*).

Virtue	Description	Ranking of importance
Goodness	To act in a way you know deep down is the right thing to do.	
Peace	A state of calmness and relaxation, where there is emotional balance and harmony.	
Chastity	The focus of your sexual desire on, and activity with, your spouse. In marriage it is the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman.	
Self-giving love (or Charity)	Ultimately sacrifice; it is the willingness to lay down one's life for another.	
Generosity	An open and forgiving largeness of soul that is prepared to give.	
Patience	To receive or suffer unwelcome actions whatever the source with calmness and resolve to endure come what may.	
Self-control	Personal integrity and involves the practice of saying 'no' to one's self.	
Gentleness	Not weakness but quiet self possession, control of self and responding without self-assertion and violence.	
Joy	Not to be confused with pleasure or happiness, rather it is an inner sense that you are in the right place, doing the right thing, with the person you want to be with for the rest of your life, as God intends.	
Faithfulness	Keeping promises and commitments, being dependable, reliable.	
Kindness	Respectful and tender care for the needs of the other.	
Modesty	Purity of heart that protects the intimate privacy of the person with patience, decency and discretion.	

Vice	Description	Ranking
Gluttony	Excessive consumption, or immoderation or an inordinate desire for food.	
Wrath	A desire for revenge, a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbour.	
Pride	The feeling that you are better than everyone else.	
Sloth	Not only laziness but a refusal to do what you know is the right thing to do because you just can't be bothered.	
Avarice	Arises from a passion for riches and the power, status and celebrity that come with being rich.	
Envy	Refers to the sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly.	
Lust	The disorder of sexual desire, when you want to pleasure yourself on another as if they were a plaything and not a person. This happens in marriage when you use each other for sexual pleasure, with no expression of love or openness to fertility.	

After about 15 minutes, come together as a group. Spend about 15 minutes making sure that each couple has the correct definitions and discussing the virtues and vices. To help do this, ask the couples about their ranking. Encourage them to share experiences, preferably of the virtues, and what a difference this has made to them. Be prepared to share some of your own stories and experiences of how certain behaviours have helped or hindered your marriage / life. Choose practical examples of things you did or said to start the couples thinking.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to continue to encourage the couples in prayer.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- St Paul sums up what love is in his famous passage which is often read at weddings.
- Either read this yourself or ask one of the couples to read it from their material.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away... So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13

- For your ‘homework’ this time you may like to reread this passage. Think about “What will we do differently as a result of this session?”
- Remember to keep praying the prayer (on p.11 in your *Couple’s Book*) the summary sheet from last session.

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.

Session 3 -

Respect the differences

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Aim: To establish practical ways of positively engaging with the differences between man and woman and explore how these can be the source of marriage's strength and richness, but also a source of misunderstanding, conflict and hurt.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain that God made males and females to complement and complete each other.
- Use effective strategies for speaking and listening.
- Indicate ways of resolving conflicts.
- Accept the importance of forgiveness and what this means.

Key Features:

- The theology of the body about masculinity and femininity.
- How to listen effectively.
- How to speak positively.
- How to resolve conflicts.
- How to forgive.

Session 3 Respect the differences

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session (10 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions. Activity: Recap the 4 types of love. Input: Brief overview of session
2. Respect the differences between man and woman (20 mins)	Input: Brief discussion of differences. Activity: Couples look at the differences in their preferences and then share some of these with the group.
3. Practical ways of respecting the differences (45 mins)	Input: Effective listening and speaking (PEARS) (10 mins). Activity: Practising effective listening and speaking (10 mins). Input: Resolving conflicts (5 mins). Activity: Understanding how each other react to conflict (15 mins). Input: Talking about conflict (EEC) (5 mins).
4. Sin and forgiveness (5 mins)	Input: Sin and forgiveness.
5. Closing words and homework (10 mins)	Activity: Session recap quiz. Prayer: Forgiveness.

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Welcome couples back to the course. Ask if anyone has any questions arising since you last met. Explain that to start you are going to complete a quick recap.

Key points: you will want to make the following points:

- Last week we looked at the question of what is love, a much used word with more than one meaning. We discussed that marriage needs four types of love – affection, friendship, erotic love and self-giving love.
- What we can do as a group is give a definition of these four types of love. (To lead this recap section it is advisable for Presenters to re-familiarise themselves with the definitions given in session 2).
 - What is affection?
 - What is erotic love?
 - What is self-giving love?
 - What is friendship?

Objectives of this session

Key points: Make the following points:

- Today we're going to look at the differences between women and men, and how these differences can be the source of your marriage's strength and richness, but also the source of misunderstanding, conflict and hurt.
- We're also going to look at simple ways of avoiding misunderstandings and conflict through thinking about how we listen and speak to each other.
- Arguments and disagreements occur in every marriage, so it's good to think about ways of resolving conflicts before you really upset and hurt each other.
- We're also going to look at a subject people don't like talking about nowadays. In some ways it is one of the taboo subjects of our society. It is sin and how our tendency to sin hurts our marriages, and why we need to forgive each other and ask God's forgiveness through prayer.

2. Respect the differences between men and women

The purpose of this section is to help the couples discuss and value the inherent differences between men and women. It is common, nowadays, to talk about men and women as either being two different species or a life-style choice. This section explores Catholic understanding

that the differences between masculinity and femininity have their origin in God's will and purpose for men and women, and that we are only complete and whole together.

Key points: You may want to make the following points:

- A couple of years ago a book came out about the differences between men and women called, 'Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus'. The truth of the matter is that men and women are not from Mars or Venus; men and women are from God.
- Femininity and masculinity have their origin in God's will and purpose for men and women, and we have been 'designed' to complement and fulfil each other as men and women.
- The obvious sign of this is the complementarities between the male and female body. It is a marvellous fact of life that males and females possess the two halves of the human reproduction system, each holding half of the genetic blue-print for a new human being. It is only through the union of these two halves that we have the potential to create new life.
- These fundamental sexual differences are at the heart of the emotional, psychological and social differences between men and women. Men are not better than women, and women are not better than men. We both need the differences of each other to be complete, happy and fulfilled.
- As well as sexual differences, there are temperamental differences, not based on sexuality, but rather the type of people we are! Some people are shy, some are 'loud'; some people need to be alone to re-charge, others re-charge through being with others. Some people think through a problem, others react emotionally. There are a vast variety of temperamental differences, and we bring these differences to our marriages. Again, one temperament is not better than another: being an extrovert is not better than being an introvert, and vice versa.

Activity

- For our first activity, it will be interesting for each couple to discuss in what ways they are different from each other. In your couples, discuss the following questions (*Couple's Book*, p.12):
 - In what ways are you different from, or the same as, each other?
 - The things you like doing. What do you like to do to relax and recharge? What energises you?
 - How do you like to receive information? (E.g. general outline vs. great detail).
 - The ways you react to things. What guides you most when you react and/or make decisions? (E.g. objective logic vs. values and feelings).

- The way you do things. Do you prefer order or flexibility? (E.g. carefully scheduled plans vs. flexible spontaneity).

After about 12 minutes come together into the group and invite couples to talk about their differences.

One of the things to be careful about here is if couples or sections of the group start talking critically or derogatorily about differences. Interestingly, the group may split along the sexes and talk jokingly about the ‘classic’ differences between men and women. This can be fun, but keep it positive.

Key points: You may want to make the following points to conclude:

- The Bible tells us that God made human beings in his ‘image and likeness’, which doesn’t mean that God in his God-ness looks like a human being, but that we share something of God’s ‘spiritual’ nature. For example, we’re not just animals driven by instincts, but personal beings who make choices and have a rich inner life of thoughts and feelings.
- The Bible also tells us that human beings are most like God in the union between men and women, especially the loving, personal union between husband and wife, because, as we saw in the first session, God is love.
- God made the attractive differences between women and men to draw us together into these deeply personal unions that can give us a touch of the divine in our lives.

3. Practical ways of respecting the differences

The purpose of this section is to help the couples start thinking about practical ways of acknowledging and respecting their differences. In particular, this section looks at listening effectively, speaking positively and resolving conflicts.

Key points: You may want to make the following points:

- The God-given differences in being men and women, and being persons with different temperaments, can give us a touch of the divine in our marriages, they can also give us an experience of ‘hell’, due to misunderstandings, conflict and really hurting each other.
- So, in this section we’re going to look at how we listen and speak to each other. At first this may seem a strange thing to do because it’s something we’ve been doing since we were babies – without really needing to think about what we’re doing .
- However, one of the biggest sources of conflicts and difficulties in marriage is failing to listen and speak to each other with attention and respect.

Listening effectively

Key points: You will want to make the following points:

- We all think listening is easy. However the evidence suggests that it is more difficult than it appears, given the amount of times people misunderstand each other especially in a tense or complex situation.
- What you hear can be influenced by all sorts of factors – your attitudes, past experiences, beliefs, temperament and mood. All of these act as a filter to what is being said and can distort and get in the way of hearing what is really being said.
- Our reactions can also result in us mis-hearing what is said. The following reactions are common:
 - As listeners we tend to generalise what we hear, perhaps thinking it applies to people in general but not to us.
 - We also over-personalise what is said, so that “What shall we have to eat?” becomes “What are you going to cook for me?”
 - We also tend not to hear or to ignore things we don’t want to hear.
- So what are the strategies for listening effectively? (**PEARS**)
 - **Probe:** Use open questions to really understand what the speaker is saying; that is, use questions which demand a fuller answer than “yes” or “no” to encourage the other person to explain more fully: e.g. “tell me a bit more about that”.
 - **Empathise:** Respect and reflect the other’s underlying feelings; put yourself in the speaker’s position.
 - **Awareness:** Be aware of our tendency to distort; really seek to understand what the other person is trying to say; build on the speaker’s ideas; do not change direction or take control of the discussion.
 - **Respond non-verbally:** Show attention, make good eye contact, and respond naturally.
 - **Summarise:** Use your own words to paraphrase what you think you’ve heard to check you’ve got it right and show that you have really been listening; do not just repeat the speaker verbatim.

Speaking positively

Key points: Make the following points:

- Just as listening is more difficult than it seems at first glance, so is speaking. Normally, of course, it is straight forward, but there are times when it is hard to make ourselves understood, particularly if you want to say something that is difficult to say or will be difficult to hear.
- The foundation for positive speaking in marriage is to make sure that you say positive things to each other regularly. Research has shown that one of the secrets to a long and happy marriage is for couples to say to each other ‘I love you’ at least once a day. Then, if a time comes when you need to say more difficult things, you are more likely to be heard. (*Presenters may find giving personal testimony could be valuable here; e.g., if you and your spouse have a practice of always telling each other you love each other, for example before leaving the house or on coming home.*)
- If you know that you have something difficult to say, there are a few things to think about:
 - **Love:** Remind yourself that you love your spouse and that he or she loves you.
 - **Intention:** Think what you are trying to say before you start to speak.
 - **Attention:** Tell your spouse what you need of him/her (e.g. “I just need you to listen to me for a minute, as there’s something I want to tell you”).
 - **Clarity:** Use short sentences.
 - **Unity:** Avoid the language of blame. Talk instead about what you would like to be different (e.g. instead of: “it’s your fault the kids were left at school – you never remember when it’s your turn to pick them up!” you could say: “I would like us to agree a way of making sure you remember when it’s your turn to pick the kids up from school.”).
- **Expression:** As well as thinking about what you are going to say, it is important to remember that messages are a complex mix of what can be called words, music and dance.
 - The words are what you say;
 - The music is your tone of voice and expression;
 - The dance is all the body language you use to express yourself: eye contact, facial expression, and gesture.
 - So the very same words can change their meaning if spoken aggressively rather than lovingly. Therefore if you are very angry, it is often a good idea to count to ten and calm down before saying anything!
 - Whenever possible you’ll want the words, music and dance of your speech to be loving, even if you are angry or upset.

Activity: Speaking and listening effectively

- The next activity will give you the opportunity to practise speaking and listening to each other. We are going to use the ‘Speaker/Listener Technique’.
- Refer the couples to the activity in the *Couple’s Book* (p.14).
- This is what we want you to do:
 - Think of an event in your own lives that you could use to practise speaking and listening; – perhaps a happy event ,e.g. an outing you have enjoyed together.
 - Decide who is going to start as the Speaker and who will start as the Listener.
 - Give the Speaker the *Couple’s Book* to hold. He/she has the ‘floor’ whilst holding it.
 - As the **Speaker** you break down what you want to say into clear points to ensure that all you want to say is actually said.
 - As the **Listener** you want to try to be an effective listener (remember PEARS). In particular, summarise, or paraphrase, what the Speaker has said to show that you have heard and clearly understood the message. It is important that you concentrate on what the Speaker is saying and don’t respond with explanations of your own, or retaliations.
 - When the Speaker has finished and is happy that the Listener has understood, the Speaker and Listener should change roles and work through the steps again with the new Speaker presenting his or her side of the events, feelings etc.

After about 10 minutes, when the couples are back in the group, discuss the following questions:

- How did it feel to really concentrate on speaking and listening to each other?
- Do you think it’s possible to speak and listen with respect all the time?
- Do you know couples who don’t listen and speak with respect? If so, what are their marriages like?
- How important do you think speaking and listening with respect will be to your marriage?

Resolving conflicts

Key points: Make the following points:

- Let’s start by thinking about the causes of conflict. When we love someone we can feel comfortable talking intimately with them; we talk more freely and about things that matter deeply to us. We reveal personal things about ourselves because we trust the

listener to welcome our confidences respectfully. However, that familiarity in how we talk to each other can lead to us being hurt by our loved ones, and to us hurting them, either intentionally or unintentionally.

- In addition to what we say to each other and how we say it, there are many other factors that can cause conflict in a relationship, such as physical or emotional abuse, one partner seeking to control or dominate the other, bullying, infidelity, jealousy, exploitation, forcing a spouse to have sexual relations against his or her will. These causes of conflict can escalate into hate and separation.
- But even if you love each other, deeply and passionately, ordinary, day-to-day things can still spark off conflict between a couple. What can cause ordinary conflict in a relationship? (*Ask the couples to list examples and write them on the left hand side of a flipchart titled “examples”*. Examples: unrealistic expectations/different expectations. Being taken for granted. Financial problems. Children. Other family members. Football!).
- What do you do when faced with conflict? (*Ask couples to list examples and write them on the right hand side of a flipchart titled “responses”*). Examples: shout, walk away, ignore, sulk.
- Most conflicts are resolved when we calm down and we’re willing to talk, listen, forgive and come to an agreement. Sometimes we just let the conflict blow over.

Activity: What do we do when we are faced with conflict?

- Working in your pairs, take some minutes to think of one or two occasions recently when you and your girlfriend/boyfriend disagreed or argued. (2 mins)
- Individually, jot down how you acted or use the tick box (*Couple’s Book*, p.15) (e.g., did you shout, become sarcastic, make a joke of it etc); then jot down how your girlfriend/boyfriend acted. (4 mins)
- Finally compare notes and consider “What aspects of your girlfriend/boyfriend’s way of handling the disagreement did you find helpful and which unhelpful?” (8 mins)

After 15 mins, review the usefulness of the activity with the whole group. Please note it is not intended to discuss the personal issues that each couple discussed, but to review the usefulness of the exercise before moving on; e.g. by asking if there were any surprises.

Key points: Make the following points:

- You need to be aware of your own conflict style as a means of controlling it and using it positively. You also need to be aware of how your partner handles conflict as it can help you understand their behaviour in a given situation.
- Here’s a useful tool to help you openly and constructively talk about behaviours or situations that upset or threaten you. It’s called ‘EEC’, which stands for Example, Effect, Change or Continue.

- **E**xample: When you contradicted me in front of our friends last night.
- **E**ffect: I felt embarrassed and angry.
- **C**hange: I don't want you to contradict me in public; can you tell me about your different point of view when we get home?

4. Sin and forgiveness

The purpose of this section is to challenge the loss of the sense of sin in both ourselves and the couples. Simply put, the major cause of marriage break-down and the high rate of divorce is due to sin and the failure of couples to seek forgiveness from God and each other. It is important to keep in mind that any teaching about sin should also be a proclamation of hope and healing, because the forgiveness of God truly is Good News for marriage.

This section could be quite challenging as there may be some resistance among couples to even the idea of sin. This can be due to many factors including education, government and health services maintaining that there is no right or wrong regarding consensual sexual behaviour; also, the wide-spread and false view, as often promoted by pop-psychology, that sin and guilt are harmful concepts that should be rejected. However, the notion and reality of 'sin' is a fundamental aspect of evangelisation that has its basis in Jesus' own proclamation of the Gospel, 'Repent and believe the Good News'.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Last session we looked at some of the behaviours which come from love and those which do not, the virtues and the vices. In this section we will be looking a bit more at those behaviours which are not acceptable in marriage.
- This links up with types of behaviour in marriage that cause serious and damaging conflict between couples, such as physical or emotional abuse, one partner seeking to control or dominate the other, bullying, infidelity, jealousy, exploitation, forcing a spouse to have sexual relations against her or his will.

Ask the following questions:

- What type of behaviour do you think is totally unacceptable in a marriage?
- Why are these types of behaviour unacceptable?

Key points: Make the following points:

- Behaviour that hurts a spouse and goes against the purpose and meaning God has given marriage – personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life – is sin.
- As you know, there are big sins and little sins. Domestic abuse is a big sin which hopefully you'll never experience; but all marriages have to cope with little sins.

- What do you think are little sins? (Examples: little white lies, bad temper, swearing).
- Sin is not something exotic or weird that only Catholics know about, but an expression of our own selfishness which we all experience everyday in ourselves and others.
- However, if sinful behaviour is unchallenged it can become an addictive habit that destroys both partners, as we see in domestic abuse. The rage and violence that fuel domestic abuse destroys not only the love between a couple but also destroys the perpetrator's personality, so they are no longer the person with whom the survivor originally fell in love.
- Sin is like drug use. A drug habit can start off with using soft drugs, like cannabis, then after awhile, to get a high, the user tries Skunk, then moves on to the hard drugs, like cocaine, crack and heroin.
- The trouble with soft sins, like little white lies or anger, is they make us vulnerable to hard sins, like adultery or violence. Like drugs, all sins are harmful.
- Forgiveness is the detox we need to rid our marriages and ourselves from the harmful build up of toxic sin in our lives.
- Jesus tells us how important it is to free ourselves and each other of sin:

“Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times””. (Matthew 18:21-22).
- One of the secrets to a healthy marriage is the willingness of both spouses to forgive each other again and again.
- This is not because we necessarily feel like forgiving the other person – forgiveness is a decision not a feeling. It is also important to remember that forgiving is not the same as saying that whatever has been done is OK.
- Sometimes, amends will still need to be made and actions may need to change.
- However, if we learn to forgive one another, it prevents the relationship from getting bogged down by unresolved conflict; the alternative is that niggles are swept under the carpet and build up to a substantial pile; friendship can be soured and each partner can end up feeling lonely and isolated.
- When something has gone wrong, where conflict has arisen and resolving it has been a painful process, remember to forgive each other the hurts that have been caused and be prepared to move on with a clean slate, so to speak. Reconciliation is an important part of resolving conflict and making your relationship all the stronger.

- As well as forgiving each other, you need to ask God's forgiveness for having spoiled his personal gift to you of love and marriage.
- Jesus has given us the sacrament of confession to receive God's powerful remedy for sin. It's better and more effective than going to the gym or jogging, and will really help and refresh your marriage. If you haven't been to confession for a while, think about going as one of the ways of preparing for your marriage.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to continue to encourage the couples in prayer.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- We have covered a lot in this session. To finish we are going to complete a quick recap quiz. (*Divide the couples into two teams or let them work as couples depending on numbers and how confident you feel the group is. Hand out a piece of paper to each team/couple to allow them to record their answers.*) Read out the following questions:
 - The Bible uses two words to tell us that God made human beings similar to himself. What are they? (Image and likeness).
 - To help us listen effectively we introduced the acronym PEARS. What do the letters PEARS stand for? (Probe, empathise, awareness, respond non-verbally, summarise)
 - We talked about EEC; when can this be used? (A useful tool to help you openly and constructively talk about behaviours or situations that upset or threaten you).
 - What does EEC stand for? (Example, Effect, Change or Continue).
 - How many times should we forgive each other? (Again and again).
- When you have finished reading out the questions get the teams/couples to give their answers. Depending on the group, decide if you want to have final scores!
- To finish this session we are going to pray together a traditional prayer asking for forgiveness that some of you may already know. It is in the *Couple's Book* (p.15).

I confess to Almighty God that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do and I ask the blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

- For your 'homework' remember to keep praying the prayer on the first summary sheet. You might also like to start using the prayer we have just said.

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.

Session 4 - God's body talk

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Aim: To appreciate that, being created by the God of love, our bodies reflect their origin in his loving purpose. This purpose informs what is the right and wrong use of our bodies.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love.
- State why contraception and IVF contradict the meaning of marital love.
- State why the marriage vows: unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life are vital to the success of a marriage.
- Explain why the Church advocates Natural Fertility Awareness.

Key Features:

- The 'nuptial significance' of maleness and femaleness.
- The Law of Self-gift and the necessary conditions for self giving.
- How contraception and IVF are a lie.
- Why it is important that sex is open to life.
- Natural Fertility Awareness.

Session 4 God's body talk

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session (10 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions Activity: Recap 'highlights' from last session Input: Brief overview of session
2. Made in the image of God (30 mins)	Activity: Quick 'opinion quiz'. Couples review statements followed by group discussion covering input on what the Catholic Church teaches about the dignity and value of having bodies created by God
3. What's wrong with contraception and IVF (20 mins)	Activity: True or false. Couples decide if statements are true or false followed by group discussion covering input on what the Church teaches about contraception and IVF
4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God? (15 mins)	Activity: Couples discuss their attitude to having children with each other
5. Closing words and homework (15 mins)	Activity: Session recap quiz Prayer

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Welcome couples back to the course. Ask if anyone has any questions arising since you last met. Explain that to start you are going to complete a quick recap.

Key points: You will want to make the following points:

- During the last session we discussed the important differences between men and women, and the fact that these differences are not accidental or life-style choices, but have their origin in God's purpose for us.
- Let's start with some of the 'highlights' which you remember from the last session about these differences. Spend a few minutes discussing what you remember and then we'll discuss them as a group.

Objectives of today's session

- Last time we talked about the differences between men and women. This session will look more deeply at the purpose behind God creating us with bodies – either masculine or feminine.
- Then we're going to look at the meaning God has written into sexual love that allows us to speak God's language of love as husband and wife.
- We're also going to look at the reasons why using contraception and IVF contradict and harm the purpose and meaning God has given sexual love.
- Finally, we'll examine why Natural Fertility Awareness is in tune with the God-given meaning of sexual love.

2. Made in the image of God

The purpose of this session is to get the couples thinking about the dignity and value of having bodies created by God. This is to counter the fashionable idea that we are the products of random chance, and can therefore do whatever we like to our own bodies and other bodies, with their consent. Once couples accept their bodies have an inherent meaning and purpose, they will be more open to the argument that it is reasonable to reject the misguided notion that it is a 'good' thing to use contraception and IVF.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we're going to look at what the Catholic Church teaches about the inherent meaning and purpose God has given our bodies as male and female, and how this meaning and purpose is expressed in marriage.

Made in the image of God

- As couples, turn to the material on ‘Made in the image of God’ (*Couple’s Book*, p.17) and take 10 minutes to fill in the questionnaire together. As a group we will then go through the answers.

After about 10 minutes come together into the group, and invite couples to share their answers.

Key points: You will want to make the following points when discussing the couples’ answers. Spend approximately 5 minutes on each statement. The model answers draw on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

1. Humans are just like the other animals, nothing more.

- **God created human beings to be a union of body and soul.** This question is about human beings being created by God as a union of body and soul.
- The answer is ‘Strongly disagree’. The fact that human beings are created as a union of body and soul means the body is never ‘something’ but always ‘someone’ who shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God’. (CCC 362-368).
- Nowadays it’s common in wildlife documentaries to refer to human beings as just being another type of animal. Now, there are certainly things we have in common with animals – our need to eat, sleep, excrete, and reproduce. However, there are such striking dissimilarities, that we must consider human beings a completely different order of being on this planet; – for example, only human beings make promises; only human beings have a sense of self and give themselves in love to another; only human beings give their lives for strangers.
- In an earlier session, we mentioned that human beings are made in the image of God, which conveys the fact that we are very different from animals; we are a union of body and soul, we are persons.
- Nowadays the only time we hear about ‘soul’ is ‘soul’ music; this captures one of the realities of the ‘soul’, which concerns profound personal feelings, most especially love, including sexual love.
- The ‘soul’ signifies the spiritual dimension of our existence, the unique, inner-life of each one of us. In Christianity, the image of the soul is the ‘heart’, not as the muscle that pumps blood around the body, but as a symbol of the inner depths of the person. The image of the heart expresses the reality of us being a unity of body and soul.
- Our language of love is full of the images of the heart, which we see especially on Valentine’s Day. Can you think of any uses of the word ‘heart’ in relation to the theme ‘love’? (‘Heart-broken’, ‘heart-ache’, ‘talking heart-to-heart’, ‘heavy-heart’, heart-felt etc.)

- All these ‘heart’ images convey an essential truth about why we have souls, why we are persons – so we can enter into relationships with others, so we can love others. The most intense experience of being a ‘person’ is the love you have for each other.
- God also gave us a spiritual nature so we could be capable of knowing and loving him.
- One of the reasons why God made us a union of body and soul is so we could form loving relationships with each other, create children to love, and love him.

2. The order and beauty of the world and the universe shows us everything has been created by God.

- **We can see signs of God’s design and purpose in nature.** This question is about seeing signs of God’s design and purpose in nature and our personal lives.
- The answer is ‘Strongly agree’. The Church teaches that we can come to know God in two ways: through our reason observing nature and ourselves, and through God’s Word in the Bible and the life of the Church. (CCC 31-38).
- Have you ever gone for a walk in the countryside, maybe somewhere remote and wild, and been struck by an overwhelming feeling of awe and wonder at its beauty and goodness? Or have you ever looked up at the stars in the night sky or at photographs of stars and galaxies in space and thought, ‘This is so beautiful and complex it must have been made somehow by God’?
- The signs of purpose and order in the universe are positive indications that God is the origin and end of everything.
- You might be surprised to hear that the Catholic Church doesn’t teach that the world was created in six days; and that the Church accepts some versions of evolution as a scientific explanation of our world. The Church doesn’t accept extreme theories of evolution that believe that human beings are the random products of chance and accidents. We hold that there is a purpose and direction to evolution, which is the emergence of self-conscious beings capable of reason and love.
- The Church also sees evidence for the existence of God as our creator in our experience of being human persons: “The human person: with our openness to truth and beauty, our sense of moral goodness, our freedom and the voice of our conscience, with our longings for the infinite and for happiness, we question ourselves about God’s existence. In all this we discern signs of our spiritual soul. The soul, the “seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material” can have its origin only in God. (CCC 33).

3. Sex is primarily for pleasure.

- **God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.** This question looks at the fact that God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.
- The answer is ‘Strongly disagree’. The Church teaches that sexual love expresses in a profound way our nature as beings created to be a union of body and soul, made in the image of God. (CCC 2331-2336; 2360-2363).
- Yes, sex is pleasurable and that’s good, and is supposed to be fun. But is sex just about achieving our own pleasure? Is sex just about pleasuring each other?
- Have you come across the term, body language? This refers to the fact that our facial expressions, the movements of our body, the gestures we make communicate signals and information about our moods, our feelings, even our thoughts. Our bodies give other people an insight into the inner depths of our personality.
- Sexual love in marriage is an intense and powerful type of body language between husband and wife.
- What does this ‘body language’ of married sexual love communicate? It says, ‘You’re the most important person in my life’; ‘I love you so much I give you my body’; ‘Your happiness and pleasure are as important to me as my own’; ‘I want to give you a moment of pleasure and joy after a day of hard work and problems’. The most important and special thing that the body language between wife and husband says is, “I love every aspect of you so much that I want to make a baby with you, who will be part of you and part of me’.
- As we discovered in the first session, ‘God is love’ and he created maleness and femaleness as a special way of sharing in his love.
- The naked bodies of husband and wife show that they have been created to communicate the body language of love in a way that intimately expresses the total gift of oneself. Marriage is written into the structure and shape of our bodies.
- This openness of ourselves, physically, psychologically and spiritually, to self-giving is so important it’s called the ‘Law of the Gift’, expressed in this sentence, ‘We can fully discover our true self only in a sincere giving of ourselves.’ (*Gaudium et Spec*)
- The ultimate expression of our self-gift in marriage is the pro-creation of children. This is because it is not only a share in God’s creative power, but also expresses the inner life of God, which is a communion of persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When a husband and wife conceive a child they too become a communion of persons. This is one of the reasons why marriage must be a deeply personal union, that is indissoluble, faithful and open to life.

4. People can do selfless things for love of others.

- **Jesus reveals and heals our capacity for self-giving love.** This question looks at the truth that Jesus reveals and heals our capacity for self-giving love.
- The answer to this is ‘Strongly agree’. The Church teaches that we can only know our true dignity and the depth of our ability to love through Jesus Christ. (*CCC* 359, 1701).
- When we hear about husbands or wives committing adultery, or about the latest incident of alcohol-fuelled domestic abuse, or a wife finding out her husband is addicted to internet pornography, people tend to make the excuse, ‘It’s only human’.
- The truth of the matter is that such behaviour is ‘less than human’, and in fact every time we commit a sin we are being ‘less than human’.
- For the past 2000 years Christians have known that only one person truly shows us what it means to be fully human and that person is Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is important to all our lives, and to our marriages, because ‘he fully reveals man to man himself’. Only in the mystery of God becoming a human being in Jesus Christ do we learn what it means to be human, what we are really capable of doing in the name of love.
- Jesus shows us the truth of the Law of the Gift and its importance in our lives, we only find ourselves by giving ourselves away in acts of love. The Cross, or Crucifix, is so important to Christians because it is the sign, or logo, of this love.
- This saying of Jesus tells us the truth about love: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”. (John 15:13).
 - Now most likely we won’t ever be in situation where we have to give our lives to save others, but every day we are called to make sacrifices for the good of others.
 - Because of our inclination, or tendency, to be selfish and commit sins we need Jesus’ help to love like him; this is why he gave us the sacraments, including the sacrament of marriage, and why it’s important to pray to him.

3. What’s wrong with contraception and IVF?

The purpose of this activity is for couples to find out for themselves why the Church teaches that contraception and In Vitro Fertilization are wrong and harm marriage. Simply put, there are two reasons: both artificially break the inseparable bond between the act of sexual love and openness to fertility. Further, contraception makes the act of love a ‘lie’ by withholding one of the essential qualities of marriage: openness to fertility.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we're going to undertake an activity to explore why the Church teaches that contraception and IVF are wrong and have no place in a Catholic marriage.
- If you turn to your *Couple's Book* (p.17) you'll see a number of statements giving reasons why the Church teaches that contraception and IVF are wrong. Some of these reasons are false and some are true. We'd like you to sort out the true reasons from the false ones.

After about 5 minutes go through the reasons the couples have chosen as being true and false and why. Spend a couple of minutes on each statement. Make sure that couples correct their answers if necessary in their material.

Why contraception and IVF are wrong? True or false

(This activity is based on Dr C O'Donnell's *Questions & Answers on Sex and Marriage*,

1. The Church is against contraception because sex is something bad and dirty

- This is false. As we've discussed throughout the course, God made erotic love because he considers sex to be not only very good, and to be enjoyed but also one of the most powerful and intimate ways of giving and receiving love between a husband and wife.

2. The Church is against contraception because it wants every act of sexual love to result in a baby.

- This is false. The Church understands that 'new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse' due to the woman's God-given, natural cycle of monthly fertility and infertility.
- Furthermore, the Church also teaches that where there are 'well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances' (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*), married couples may then take advantage of Natural Fertility Awareness to abstain from sexual relations during the woman's fertile period, and have sexual intercourse during the infertile period. This does not go against God's will for our fertility because the couple are using the natural, God-given cycles for their correct purpose.
- God, in his wisdom, has given us a natural, simple way of being responsible parents that involves our intelligence, self-control and loving consideration. However, the couple must ensure that their motivation is the good of the family and not some selfish desire.

3. The Church is against contraception because it makes a lie out of God's language of love.

- This is true. As we've seen in this session, God created masculinity and femininity to enable husbands and wives to express mutual self-giving and receiving in love. Fertility is not an optional extra but a fundamental dimension of maleness and femaleness. Recognising this, the essential signs of love in marriage are deeply personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness, and openness to fertility. The problem with artificial contraception – sheath, pill, coil, implant, injection – is that they withhold fertility. It makes the act of sexual love a lie, because the body language is saying, 'I love everything about you except your natural fertility.'

4. The Church is for couples spacing the number of children using Natural Fertility Awareness.

- This is true. The Church actively supports scientists and doctors discovering more about the natural periods of fertility and infertility that God has given women in their monthly cycle. This is not to be confused with older, less reliable methods such as the Rhythm Method, but is based on observations of natural changes to the woman's body. A detailed exposition of this falls outside the scope of this course, but practitioner teachers of the ovulation method or multiple-indicators can be found on the web.

5. The Church allows couples to use Natural Fertility Awareness to permanently avoid further pregnancies once a couple decides they have the number of children they want.

- This is false. The Church beseeches couples to avoid having a 'contraceptive mentality' which means using the awareness of the fertile and infertile periods in a woman's cycle to avoid having any further children. This would be an abuse of God's will in creating this natural monthly cycle. The basic purpose of sexual love is the procreation of children, and this should be honoured in marriage. The difference between contraception and Natural Fertility Awareness is that contraception is unnatural and artificially suppresses a good and natural function – the couple's fertility.

6. The Church is against IVF because children conceived in a test tube are not really human.

- This is false. Every child born through IVF is fully and truly a human being, with a soul created by God. However, the Church believes that every child has the right to be conceived from within the intimate act of self-giving love between wife and husband.

7. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't want the marriage bed to be replaced by the laboratory

- This is true. There is a natural security that comes from reserving conception of human beings within the woman's body. Once this natural security is broken, as it is with IVF, all kinds of gravely immoral acts become possible. For example, experimentation on embryonic human beings, gender selection, eugenics of embryonic human beings with disabilities, and the creation of animal/human hybrids.

8. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't care about the suffering of infertile couples.

This is false. The Church continues to express her deep sympathy, care and recognition of the suffering caused by infertility. The *Catechism* states: 'Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.' (CCC 1654). Also, the Church promotes the use of medicine, surgery, and Natural Fertility Awareness for couples suffering from infertility and sub-fertility, that is, medically unexplained problems conceiving.

4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God?

The purpose of this section is to help couples talk about what it means to be open to life, – open to share their lives with children. After talking about the tragedy and sadness of contraception, it's good to end this session on the promising note of having children.

Key points: Make the following points:

- When you make your marriage vows, you will make the following promise: I am ready to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church.
- Turn to the final activity of this session, 'Accepting Children', (*Couple's Book*, p.18) and spend a few minutes in couples thinking about the following questions.
 - What do we mean when we say that children are a gift from God?
 - Would you want your children to be brought up in the Catholic faith? Why?

After 5 minutes, when the couples come back to the group, invite them to share any thoughts.

Key points: Make the following points:

- One of the original blessings God gave human beings was the command: ‘Be fruitful and multiply’.
- Children are one of the great gifts of life, along with the gift of our own existence and the wonderful gift of love between man and woman. This whole cluster of gifts from God goes together, usually.
- This is what the Church tells us about children: “A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment... called to give life, spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God... they are co-operating with the love of God the Creator”. (CCC 2366-7).
- Having children is taking part in God’s creative work; it is the fruitfulness of God’s original blessing. Parents become co-operators with the love of God the Creator, and in a sense make that love present.
- This is shown in a couple’s openness to life, the gift of their whole being – the gift of their fertility – through which they share in God’s life-giving love.
- In this way marriage opens up the wonderful and demanding vocation to parenthood, one of the most powerful experiences of our capacity for self-giving love.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to recap the session and to continue to encourage the couples in prayer.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- Some of the things which we have talked about today can be difficult because they go against current ‘popular public opinion’. It is important that you appreciate the arguments being made because you may face great pressure to use contraception and/or IVF. In these circumstances you will really be called upon to practice self-giving love.
- To help us reflect on what we have learnt today, can each of you individually jot down the key points you would make in response to the following questions (*have some paper ready – pause between the questions*):
 - What would you explain as being the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love?
 - Why would you say that contraception contradicts the meaning of marital love?

- Why would you say that IVF contradicts the meaning of marital love?
- Why are the marriage vows (unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life) vital to the success of a marriage?
- Why does the Church advocate Natural Fertility Awareness?
- This exercise that we have done is not easy! You will probably need more time to reflect on what we have covered.
- For 'homework' read the summary material (*Couple's Book*, p.18-19) and think about "What will we do as a result of this session?"
- Remember to keep praying the prayer on the summary sheet from the first session.

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.

Session 5 - Jesus' helping hand

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Session 5 Jesus' helping hand

Aim: To see how a proper understanding of who Jesus is helps us understand what happens when we receive the Sacrament of Marriage. To appreciate the importance of this sacrament in helping us face the difficult times in our marriage.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain what a sacrament is and how sacraments help and support us through life.
- Highlight why marriage is a sacrament.
- Indicate their, and each other's, approaches to dealing with change.
- Discuss how they deal with suffering.
- Apply some practical actions to help with change and suffering.

Key Features:

- Sacraments: Jesus' power to heal and teach has been passed on through the sacraments.
- The nature of grace. Sharing the life and energy of God.
- Why do we need a sacrament to be married?
- Dealing with change.
- Coping with suffering.

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session. (15 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions. Activity: Recap from last session. Input: Brief overview of session.
2. Who do you say Jesus is? (25 mins)	Activity: Read three passages and select the one closest to your beliefs. Input: Who is Jesus and what does this mean for the sacrament of marriage?
3. What is a sacrament anyway? (25 mins)	Activity: Couples think of three symbols of the other person. Input: What is a symbol, what is a sacrament? The sacrament of marriage?
4. How do we deal with change and suffering? (20 mins)	Activity: Discussion among couples. Input: Personal testimony from Presenters regarding suffering.
6. Closing words and homework. (5 mins)	Input: Brief summary.

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Have ready a flipchart with instructions and pieces of paper or card with topics you have covered on the course written on them, enough for one per couple. Select topics which are/ have been of particular interest to your group or which they may have had difficulty with.

Key points: You may like to consider using the following topics:

- Personal unity, indissolubility, and faithfulness (or fidelity).
- Openness to fertility and Natural Fertility Awareness.
- The four types of love: affection, friendship, erotic love, self-giving love.
- The virtues: self-giving love (or charity), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. The vices: pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth.
- Listening and speaking effectively.
- Resolving conflicts.

Activity

You can run this activity either by asking each couple to select a card and then prepare a quick one minute summary to feedback to the group on the key points they remember, and, why they think this is important in marriage *or* run the activity as a 'Just-a-Minute' game – in which case you will need a stopwatch.

The flipchart instructions for the one minute summary are: “You have 5 minutes to prepare a quick one minute summary of the key points you remember for the topic on your card, and, why this is important in marriage”

The flipchart instructions for the 'Just-a-Minute' game are: “You have one minute to talk on the topic on your card without hesitation or repetition of words not on the card. Couples may challenge by raising their hand if you do hesitate or repeat a word. If the challenge is successful they continue with the subject for the remaining time unless challenged”

The notes below are written for the 'Just-a-Minute' option; adapt these if you are using the one minute summary option. Welcome couples back to the course. Ask if anyone has any questions rising since you last met.

Key points: Make the following points:

- For our opening activity we are going to think about some of the areas we have covered so far on the course.
- To do this we are going to play a quick game called 'Just-a-Minute'. You may be familiar with the game. The rules are that you have one minute to talk about the topic on the

card without hesitation or repetition of any words, except those on the card. If another couple thinks you have hesitated or repeated a word they can raise their hand. If their challenge is correct then they take over the subject for the time remaining until the minute is finished – provided they themselves do not get challenged.

Ask someone to volunteer to go first and hand them the first card. Ask them to read out the topic and start, start the stop watch at the same time. Be alert for challenges and stop the watch as necessary. If the challenge is successful ask the person to hand the card to the successful challenger, ask them to continue and continue the stop watch. Keep doing this as challenges arise until the end of 1 minute at which point stop the proceedings. Thank everyone and continue with the next topic and a new volunteer. If you want to ‘score’ then ask give a point for each successful challenge and for the person who is speaking when the minute finishes.

Which ever option you decide to use finish the recap about 10 minutes into the session.

Objectives of this session

- Every sacrament in the Catholic Church, including marriage, puts us in touch with Jesus Christ. So, it’s important we understand who Jesus really is, and what he did 2,000 years ago that can help us live happy and fulfilled marriages now in the 21st century.
- Then we’ll look at what a sacrament is, and how sacraments help us in general, and how the sacrament of marriage will help you in particular.
- We’ll also discuss how we cope with changes in life, including suffering, and how having faith in Jesus helps us get through the tough times.

2. Who do you say Jesus is?

The purpose of this section is to challenge the couples with the central question of our faith: ‘Who do you say I am?’ It presents the couples with three portraits of Jesus that invite them to answer the question, “ Was Jesus bad, mad, or God?”. What the couple believe about Jesus determines what they believe they are doing when they make their marriage vows, and ultimately if they engage with the sacrament of marriage.

Key points: Make the following points:

- The reason why we’re here preparing you for your marriage – the reason why you are able to have your wedding in a Catholic Church – is because of one person who walked the earth 2,000 years ago in Israel, Jesus of Nazareth.
- What you believe about your marriage in the Catholic Church, and how you choose to live the sacrament of marriage depends on what you think about Jesus Christ, and what he means to you.

- In our first activity we're going to look at three statements about Jesus. You need to decide which one you believe to be correct, in that it best expresses what you think about him. The statements are in your *Couple's Books* (p.21).

Who do you say Jesus is?

Version One: Jesus pretended that he was God, and knowingly misled people by claiming to forgive people's sins, heal people of all kinds of disease and by challenging the corruption and exploitation done in the name of God.

Jesus was arrested and put on trial by the Jewish religious authorities for claiming to be God. Facing the death penalty, Jesus maintained his fraud before a hostile court and a sympathetic Roman politician who bent over backwards to let him go.

Jesus was tortured and publically disgraced, and finally killed by means of the most feared method of execution, crucifixion.

Once he was dead, and buried, his followers pretended that he had physically come back to life, and immediately made converts from among the people who had personally witnessed his public exposure as a fraud and his shameful death.

Version Two: Jesus was insane and suffered from the delusion that he was God, and created mass hysteria by claiming to forgive people's sins, heal people of all kinds of disease and by challenging the corruption and exploitation done in the name of God.

In a highly sophisticated religious culture based on detailed knowledge of Scripture and public debate, despite being mad, Jesus gained a reputation as a convincing and moving orator and debater, who defeated all attempts to trap him into breaking religious and political laws.

Jesus was arrested and put on trial by the Jewish religious authorities for claiming to be God. Facing the death penalty, Jesus maintained a dignified silence under intense pressure from a hostile court and a sympathetic Roman politician who bent over backwards to let him go.

Jesus was tortured and publically disgraced, and finally killed by means of the most feared method of execution, crucifixion. During the whole harrowing ordeal Jesus retained his composure and was rational to his dying breath.

Once he was dead, and buried, his followers completely deluded themselves that he had physically come back to life, even to the point of them being tortured and killed for believing Jesus was God. They immediately made converts from among the people who had personally witnessed his public exposure as a mad man and his shameful death.

Version Three: Jesus knew he was the Son of God and had been aware since his birth as a human being of his relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Faced with the full range of human suffering, Jesus forgave sins, healed people of diseases, and challenged the corruption and exploitation done in the name of God.

Jesus knew that his conflict with the forces of evil would lead to his arrest, torture and execution on the Cross, but he accepted that this was the price that he was uniquely called to pay to free us from our addiction to sin, to mend the estrangement in our relationship with God, and to show us that God loved us so much that, though he was sinless, he was willing to die for us, sinners.

Jesus was arrested and put on trial by the Jewish religious authorities for claiming to be God. Facing the death penalty, Jesus publically claimed to be the Son of God, and maintained a dignified silence before a Roman politician who bent over backwards to let him go.

Three days later, despite precautions taken by the Jewish and Roman authorities, Jesus rose from the dead, confirming his claim to be God. Though at first the apostles didn't believe that Jesus had been resurrected, they couldn't deny what they saw with their own eyes, and what they could touch with their own hands.

Given authority and power by Jesus, the apostles immediately made converts from among the people who had personally witnessed his public trial, execution and shameful death, and saw the visible effect of Jesus' Resurrection on his followers.

Give people about 5 minutes to read the passages to themselves and decide which one most closely expresses their beliefs.

Key points: Make the following points:

1. Version one: Jesus is depicted as essentially 'bad'. This version of Jesus' life says that he was a bad man who knowingly lied about being God, and deceived people on purpose.

- It is common for people to believe that Jesus was a good man, a great moral figure, but nothing more, and definitely not God. However, the Gospels make it clear that Jesus claimed to be God. If Jesus lied and deceived people about such an important thing then he was morally and religiously wicked, and by no stretch of the imagination could he be described as a good man.
- The counter-argument to the proposition that Jesus was a bad man is simply presented in this statement:

Everyone who reads the Gospels with an open mind agrees that Jesus was a good and wise man, a great and profound teacher. Most nonreligious people, and even many people of other religions, like Gandhi, see him as history's greatest moral teacher. He is, in short, eminently trustworthy.

(cf. Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p.155)

- Regarding the proposition that the apostles lied about Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead, we have to ask ourselves, what was their motive? Deception always has a selfish motive, so what did the apostles get from lying about Jesus? History tells us they were driven out of their community, persecuted, and most of them suffered torture and execution. Why would they and the thousands who followed them suffer torture and death for a lie?

2. Version two: Jesus is depicted as essentially 'mad'. This version of Jesus' life says that Jesus didn't consciously deceive others when he claimed to be God, but was delusional due to mental illness.

- Psychiatry is full of case studies of people who suffer from a 'God complex'. The symptoms of this illness are well documented: egotism, extreme self-love, inflexibility, dullness, an inability to understand or love others as they really are, and a failure to relate to others. The Gospels show us that Jesus' character and relationships with others were the exact opposite of those of someone suffering mental illness.
- The counter argument to the proposition that Jesus was mad is simply presented in this statement:

More than any other man in history, Jesus had the three essential virtues every human being needs and wants: wisdom, love and creativity. He wisely and cannily saw into people's hearts, behind their words. He solved insolvable problems. He also gave totally to others, including his very life... The most common reaction of those who met Jesus was 'wonder'. Lunatics are not wonderful, but Jesus was the most wonderful person in history.

(cf. Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p.159)

- Regarding the proposition that the apostles were delusional about Jesus' bodily resurrection, the following objections can be raised:
 - The Gospels and letters of the apostles and their followers do not display the exaggerated, grandiose language of madness, but are straightforward, practical, and rational.
 - Most people are not convinced by the claims of mad people, so we would expect the apostles to have remained an isolated, short lived group. However in their life time, the Church expanded from 12 apostles, Mary and a few women, to an organisation spread throughout the Roman Empire comprising 100,000's converts that was able not only to survive intense persecution, but thrive as a result of it.

3. Version three: Jesus is God. There is one key event in Jesus' life on which the question of his divinity hangs – the claim of his bodily resurrection from the dead.

- St Paul expresses its importance as follows: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain”. (1 Corinthians 15:14).
- The Resurrection of Jesus is the greatest mystery in human history meaning what happened escapes our understanding and explanations. However, we can judge the truth of it being a real objective event on its effects on the first Christians.
- We know that something remarkable and momentous happened because the Gospels make it clear that the apostles were dramatically transformed. Before the Resurrection the apostles were frightened men hiding from the religious and political authorities out of fear that they too would be tortured and executed. After the Resurrection the apostles were changed into courageous leaders who went about openly holding mass meetings in Jerusalem and throughout the Roman Empire proclaiming that Jesus had risen from the dead and that he was God.
- Now this is an amazing thing for people to believe at any time in human history, but it is absolutely amazing for Jews of the 1st century to believe! They considered God so powerful, so holy and so different from human beings that they didn't even dare speak his name, believing that it was too holy to pass from human lips.
- Something remarkable must have happened for them to believe that a man they knew was God. That something was the bodily Resurrection of Jesus.
- Also, the other thing to know is that the Jewish religious culture was very rational, very passionate about the truth and respectful of God's word and law. It was not a religion based on hysteria or religious frenzy.
- One of the leading exponents of Jewish religious culture at that time was a Jew called Saul. He was so outraged by the apostles' claims that Jesus was God that he organised their persecution, and was involved in the execution of one of the first converts, Stephen.
- Saul was the last person to witness the resurrected Jesus, and his life was turned upside down by the event. He became known as Paul, and became one of the great figures of the Church.
- He wasn't converted by an idea, or by an act of kindness, he was converted by meeting Jesus in all his glory as God.
- Millions of people since have been convinced that Jesus is God, even though they haven't seen him like the apostles and St Paul. Instead, they have faith in the goodness, truth and beauty they find in the Bible and in the Church.

- What does it mean if you think Jesus was bad or mad, and that his followers are bad or mad? If you think version one and version two best sums up what you think about Jesus don't worry we're not going to put any pressure on you to convert or brain wash you. However, what ever version you believe you need to think very carefully about the following questions:
 - During the marriage service, what do you think happens when you make your vows to each other before the priest or deacon, and in front of your friends?
 - To whom are you making your promises to form a close, personal, permanent, faithful and fruitful union?
- While it is great to be able to make the promises to each other and before our friends – God is present, irrespective of our belief or not.
- You have asked to get married in the Church. By your intention to get married in the Church, when you exchange your promises and give your consent to be married it is before the Church, witnessed by the priest or deacon, and the congregation. It is saying that you intend what the Church intends, that is to form a close, personal, permanent, faithful and fruitful union.
- This intention on your part and the promises that you make in public creates the marriage bond, which God seals, even if you don't believe in him. When you consummate your marriage through sexual intercourse you definitively express the meaning and purpose of the vows and consent you made during the rite of marriage – total self-giving love to the point where two become one, until death.
- So, if you intend what the Church intends, you have received the sacrament of marriage, even if you don't fully share the faith of the Church.
- To use a sacrament and to fully benefit from have received it you have to believe. We believe things everyday – we believe each other when we say 'I love you!', we believe our friends when they say they want to go out for a drink, we even believe the weather report, sometimes. 'Believing' is about trust, usually trust in the word of another person.
- Before now and your wedding day, you have to ask yourselves, do you believe us when we tell you that during the rite of marriage Jesus will come into your lives in a special way? Ultimately, this means do you believe that Jesus is God, and do you believe what the Church tells you about Jesus?

- We believe that the sacrament of marriage will make your marriage happier, bring you closer together and help you become more loving and appreciative of each other through the difficult times. We believe this because this is what we have experienced as Catholics.
- To use a sacrament and to fully benefit from having received it, you have to want to know who Jesus is and you have to want to believe in him! That's all you have to do, you just have to 'want' to understand and believe, and the whole thing will open up for you.
- Most of you already have a huge advantage because you have received the sacrament of baptism and confirmation. These powerhouses of faith are just waiting to be fired up by your desire to believe and a chain reaction of faith, hope and love will energise you!
- Jesus wants to help you through the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of baptism and confirmation but he never forces anyone to believe. Jesus always leaves it up to your free choice to have his friendship and help, or not.

3. What is a sacrament anyway?

The purpose of this section is to help the couples understand sacraments by setting sacraments in the everyday context of the role symbols play in our lives. Having looked at how symbols work, we'll then explore how the sacraments put us in touch with the life, love and grace of Jesus.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Some of you may have heard the old song 'Tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree'. In this song the yellow ribbon had a special meaning for the couple involved and it showed to each other if they still loved each other or not.
- In this activity we want you, as couples, to imagine that you're going to be separated for a year for some reason, such as work or family responsibilities, and you have to choose three special objects that will not only remind you of your loved one, but also make them feel close. For example, a memento from a holiday, or romantic weekend, something you associate with an interest or hobby of your fiancée, an article of clothing, or music.

After about 5 minutes, ask the group what objects they chose, and why they chose them.

Key points: Make the following points:

Symbols

- These objects which you have chosen are symbols – they are more than just things, they communicate and make real the person we love; they represent the other person and help us remember them or something about them. They can invoke in us feelings of love and happiness for the person and sadness that our loved one is away.
- These objects which you have talked about are private symbols, but we also have public, universal symbols. For example, light is a symbol of goodness, darkness represents evil, water is a symbol of life and death.
- Symbols push beyond what we see, hear and touch to communicate feelings and experiences which are personal and meaningful.

Sacraments

- So, what have symbols got to do with sacraments?
- Sacraments are symbols arising from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus took ordinary, everyday things and gave them a special meaning and power, such as water, oil, bread, wine, and certain words.
- Jesus' words and deeds with these symbols are not dead history, but powerful realities that make him really present in our lives now because they are the words and deeds of a man who is God.
- These sacraments – when received by us in trust and hope – are real encounters with God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- Our private symbols affect us emotionally and spiritually, maybe sparking off memories and feelings. However, Jesus' symbols and words make real what they represent and communicate; they don't just affect our feelings or memories.
- The important thing to realise about sacraments is that when the Church uses these symbols, given special meaning by Jesus, they do exactly what they are expressing. The symbol of Baptism is water, which represents life and being clean, but the sacrament of Baptism really gives us the life of Jesus and cleanses us from sin.
- The symbol of the Eucharist is bread and wine, which represents food to satisfy hunger. The sacrament of the Eucharist feeds our deep spiritual hunger and need with the real, physical presence of Jesus.
- All the sacraments give us a different gift from Jesus to help us in our lives, to help us

become the people we're meant to be, which is to be like Jesus, and to help us cope with the trials and tribulations of life.

- These sacramental gifts are called 'grace', which also means 'gift'. However, it's not the gift of an object or thing; it's the gift of God's love which, if we accept it and believe in it, can empower and transform our lives personally and together.

The sacrament of marriage

- Let's look at what exactly happens when you receive the sacrament of marriage.
- In particular, what are the symbols of marriage, what do they represent, and what aspect of Jesus' life does the sacrament of marriage make real in our lives?
- If you remember, the symbols of the sacrament of the Eucharist are bread and wine. The symbols of the sacrament of marriage are the consent of the bride and bridegroom to be married.

The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that "makes the marriage." If consent is lacking there is no marriage. The consent consists in a "human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other": "I take you to be my wife" – "I take you to be my husband." This consent, that binds the spouses to each other, finds its fulfilment in the two "becoming one flesh". (CCC 1626-1627)

- Just as you must have real bread and real wine for the sacrament of the Eucharist, you must have the real consent of a man and a woman, which is then consummated through the sexual act, for the sacrament of marriage. The union of masculinity and femininity, through word and deed, is the *symbol* that makes the sacrament real and active.
- Similarly just as the sacrament of the Eucharist *feeds* our deep spiritual hunger and need with the real, physical presence of Jesus, the sacrament of marriage does what it says – it makes the two into one.
- So, what aspect of Jesus' life does the union of husband and wife make present in your lives and the life of the Church? In the same way Jesus transformed the meaning and purpose of bread and wine to become his body and blood, he transformed the marriage between a bridegroom and bride to represent and make really present Jesus' self-giving love for his people.
- Your love for each other, and your love for your children, is a living reminder to all of us of how much God loves humanity. Your love can really make God's love present in this world.
- If you live your marriage with awareness and acceptance of the meaning and purpose

given it by God, then your lives will be enriched and strengthened by the gift – the grace – of the sacrament of marriage.

- This is how the *Catechism* describes the effect of this gift:

Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ", and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb... (CCC 1642)

- This is another way of saying that at times your marriage will give you both a glimpse of the happiness and bliss of heaven.
- Let's be clear here, this is not being idealistic or naive, but God's honest truth, because sometimes you will glimpse heaven through having the strength and love to face together the upheavals and turmoil that life brings.
- To summarise, there are two main reasons why we need the sacrament to be married. Firstly, we need it on a personal level to help us keep the promises we make to each other – to really live a marriage of love for each other. Secondly, we need the sacrament of marriage on a social level, so that we can make God's love present in this world.

4. How do we deal with change and suffering?

The purpose of this section is to encourage the couples to look at how they cope with change and suffering, which will be the living context of how they live the sacrament of marriage.

Key points: Make the following points:

- We have said that the sacrament of marriage helps you face the upheavals and turmoil that life brings. In this section we are going to look at this in more detail.
- We know that change has to happen and in our decision to get married we are insisting on it; yet there is something in our being which feels threatened by an unknown future. We looked at how you are going to combine your two lives when you get married (Session 2), but however much you plan, things change throughout a marriage as well.
- Different people react differently to different changes. There are those who love the idea of change and always want to be doing something 'exciting and new'. There are those who value and cherish the present and do not want things to be 'spoilt' by change.
- When we talked about communicating (Session 3), we emphasised that you are now making decisions as a couple. However, all change is a potential source of friction. Don't assume that your reaction or your girlfriend / boyfriend's reaction to any event will be the same as yours.
- We are going to look at how you as a couple deal with change.

Activity

Invite the couples to turn to the “Dealing with change” activity (*Couple’s Book*, p.22) and, as couples, to follow the instructions which are as follows:

- **Step 1** Agree on one or two major changes you foresee affecting your marriage, (perhaps having children, moving house or moving to a different part of the country).
- **Step 2** Take a few minutes to think individually about them. What are the positive things you think will come out of that change? What are the negatives or downsides?
- **Step 3** When you have done that compare notes with your girlfriend/boyfriend. Are your views the same or different and how?
- Spend a few minutes sharing the results with the group.

After about 10 minutes, share the findings among the group, spending 2/3 minutes on each couple.

- Just now we looked at hopefully happy, if challenging, events, but of course change can be for the worst. Consider the following ‘disasters’: death of a close friend or relative, losing your job, serious injury or chronic illness. Think how events like these could affect your marriage.

At this point it could be a good idea for one of the Presenters to give his / her experience of change and suffering in their marriage, e.g. unemployment, illness / bereavement. What helped? What didn’t help? How did awareness of living the sacrament of marriage help cope with change and suffering?

Key points: Make the following points:

- However you deal with change, and in particular suffering, there are a few important pointers to always remember, all of which are strengthened through the grace we receive through the sacrament of marriage.
- **Communicate:** Remember the importance of effective listening and speaking. Do not cut yourself off from one another but be sensitive to one another’s need for ‘space’. Be honest with one another.
- **Practise the virtues:** Especially kindness; be particularly attentive and loving to each other. Be prepared to persevere, to hold on when the going gets tough rather than cut and run.
- **Pray:** We will be talking more about this in the next session.
- **Use your community network:** During times of change and suffering it is important to remember that as a couple you are not on your own, but part of a larger network of care and love, either through your family, friends or parish. Sometimes it may be necessary to seek outside help to cope with overwhelming problems, such as grief or depression.

- **Humour:** It can help us to laugh at our predicaments, which may make it possible to transcend anxiety and pain. However, this only works if the other factors in this list are in place, or it can become another disguise for anger at the other person's expense, and/or hurtful and destructive.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to finish the session and to continue to encourage the couples in prayer.

Key points: Make the following points:

- We have covered quite a lot of material: who Jesus is, what a symbol is, what a sacrament is, and how the sacrament of marriage helps you face the change and suffering that life entails.
- For 'homework' read through the summary material (*Couple's Book*, p.20-23) and think about what we have covered.
- Remember to keep praying the prayer on the summary sheet from the first session.

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.

Session 6 - *Loving each other in Christ*

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session.
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections.
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.
- *Please note that in this session you should arrange to be able to visit the church.*

Session 6 Loving each other in Christ

Aim: To appreciate the significance and meaning of the different parts of the wedding service and that marriage is made in prayer.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain that they confer the sacrament of marriage on each other, before the Church and sealed by God.
- State the significance of the different elements of the marriage liturgy.
- Explain the meaning of the symbols of marriage.
- Prepare for their own marriage service.
- Describe the importance of prayer.

Key Features:

- Liturgy as participation in the life of God.
- The different parts of the marriage liturgy.
- The marriage vows.
- The exact point at which they are married.
- Praying together.

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session (10 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions. Input: Brief overview of session.
2. Promises before God and His Church (20 mins)	Activity: Match the promises in the Marriage Rite with the essential qualities of marriage. Input: Read through the consent section of the Marriage Rite.
3. Marriages are made in prayer. (20 mins)	Input: The importance of prayer and a simple approach (TSP).
4. Visit to the church (30 mins)	Activity: Visit the Church with input on a selection of liturgical objects, symbols and actions.
5. Closing words and homework (10 mins)	Input: Final thanks.

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Start by asking if there are any questions arising from the material so far and deal with any points as required.

We covered a lot of things last week: who Jesus is, what a symbol is, what a sacrament is, how the sacrament of marriage helps. Here's a few questions to help you recall some of the things we discussed last week:

What is a symbol?

What is a sacrament?

What is the difference between receiving the sacrament of marriage and a registry office marriage?

Key points: Make the following points:

Objectives of today's session

- The objective of today's session is to help you think about meaning and significance of the rite of marriage.
- To this end, we look at the vows that you will make to each other and to God. In particular we will explain:
 - How marriage as liturgy is prayer, and for you to fully participate in your wedding you need to pray. Liturgy is another word for a service in Church. Baptism or christening is liturgy, the Mass is liturgy and your wedding is liturgy.
- We will also go through the rite of marriage in the church.
- Finally, we will explain the meaning of the liturgical signs.

2. Promises before God and his Church

The purpose of this section is to encourage the couples to reflect on both the seriousness and the beauty of the promises that they make to each other and to God before the Church, and their family and friends.

Key points: Make the following points:

- The previous 5 sessions have been leading to this final session when we look at the significance and meaning of the different parts of the wedding service, or as it's called in the Catholic Church: the Rite of Marriage.
- A rite is the way we celebrate a religious ceremony or in this case how we will celebrate your reception of the sacrament of marriage.
- At the heart of the rite of marriage are your promises to each other and to God and your public declaration that you both freely consent to accept each other as husband and wife in marriage.

Promises before God and his Church

- In this activity we want you to ‘match’ the promises from the wedding service with one of the four essential qualities of marriage: personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life (*Couple’s Book* p.24).

After about 5 minutes come together as a group and go through the answers.

Promises from Marriage Rite	Essential quality of Marriage
<p>Are you ready freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?</p> <p>Bridegroom: I am.</p> <p>Bride: I am.</p>	Personal union
<p>Are you ready to love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?</p> <p>Bridegroom: I am.</p> <p>Bride: I am.</p>	Indissolubility
<p>Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?</p> <p>Bridegroom: I am.</p> <p>Bride: I am.</p>	Openness to fertility
<p>Bridegroom and Bride:</p> <p>I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, NN do take thee, NN to be my lawful wedded wife (husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, In sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part.</p>	Faithfulness

Key points: Make the following points:

- By making these promises in the presence of the priest or deacon, who represents the whole Church, and your family and friends, you are making a public commitment to live by the purpose and meaning God has given marriage.
- You are both promising to become close friends, you are promising that you’ll never even think about divorce, you are promising that you’ll never have sexual or other inappropriately intimate relations with another man or woman, and you are promising that you be open to welcome whatever children God gives you. These promises are binding until the death of one of you.

- Here's an interesting question: When you come to Church on your wedding day who is it that gives you the sacrament of marriage? Most people think it's the priest or deacon, but it's actually both of you, the bride and bridegroom.
- According to the tradition of the Church in these parts, you are the ministers of Christ's grace who confer on each other the sacrament of marriage when you express your consent before the representatives of the Church.
- This shows in a very striking way, that marriage has been written into your masculinity and femininity, and that because of this you both have the inherent 'power' to confer on each other the sacrament of marriage.
- You receive this 'power' directly from God, who has also given a direction and channel for the proper expression of this power, the sacrament of marriage as safeguarded and taught by his Church.
- What do you think is the moment during the rite of marriage when you actually become husband and wife? It is the part of the rite called 'Consent'. Let's have a look at this part. Turn to your *Couple's Book* (p.25) and we will go through it.

The priest or deacon invites the couple to declare their consent:

Priest or Deacon: Since it is your intention to enter marriage, declare your consent before God and his Church.

(To the Bridegroom) N.N., will you take N.N. here present for your lawful wife, according to the rite of our holy Mother the Church? *Bridegroom: I will.*

(To the Bride) N.N., will you take N.N. here present for your lawful husband, according to the rite of our holy Mother the Church? *Bride: I will.*

The Bride and Bridegroom join their right hands. The Bridegroom then says after the Priest or Deacon, or reads:

Bridegroom: I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, N.N. (full name, including surname), do take thee, N.N. (full name, including surname), to be my lawful wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

They separate their hands for a moment and then rejoin them. Then the Bride says after the Priest or Deacon, or reads:

Bride: I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, N.N. (full name, including surname), do take thee, N.N. (full name, including surname), to be my lawful wedded husband to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

At this moment you have both conferred on each other the sacrament of marriage, and you are now married. The Priest or Deacon then receives your consent on behalf of the Church with this prayer:

Priest or Deacon: You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God had joined together, let no man put asunder.

Marriage bond

The blessing and exchange of rings is a symbol of your consent and creation of your marriage bond blessed by God. When you consummate your marriage through sexual intercourse you definitively express the meaning and purpose of the vows and consent you made during the rite of marriage – total self-giving love to the point where two become one.

Check whether there are any questions in respect of the promises you have just read.

3. Marriages are made in prayer

The purpose of this section is to encourage the couples to understand the importance of prayer to their marriage.

Key points: Make the following points:

- You may have heard the saying that ‘marriages are made in heaven’, which expresses the truth that God has planned your marriage as the best way possible for your lives.
- It is also true that ‘marriages are made in prayer’, which explains the most important thing you need to do to have a wonderful wedding day. Yes, flowers, a beautiful dress, and an enjoyable reception can help, but most of all you need prayer.
- The rite of marriage is a sequence of prayers and promises, which are best understood and said by the bride and bridegroom in a spirit of prayer.
- This may seem unusual or strange to you if prayer is not already part of your lives; but don’t worry – prayer is simple, not complicated.
- As we discussed in an earlier session prayer is keeping company with God, it is a relationship, a conversation between the Creator and his creation, father/mother and child, lover and beloved. You don’t need to use religious words, just words that come from your heart.
- It helps to use this three step method of talking to God, the TSP approach:

T – Thanks. Thank God for the good things that have happened today or in your life.

S – Sorry. Say sorry for the bad things that have happened today or in your life.

P – Please. Ask God for help for things or people that you care about.

- It also helps to say the basic prayers of the Church, such as the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary*, purposefully, that is, really thinking about the meaning of the words.
- You'll also enjoy your wedding day more if you take a copy of the rite of marriage home and read and pray the prayers before hand – all the prayers, not just the ones you say.

4. Visit to the church

The purpose of this section is to take the couples into the church and explain the meaning and significance of its parts and the symbols inside. It sets the context for their celebration of marriage. For couples who rarely enter a church, this is an opportunity for liturgical catechesis – that is, explaining liturgical actions and words (maybe for the first time in their adult lives). One of the goals is to make them feel at ease in the church, while at the same time communicating the need for respect in the house of God.

What follows is a reflection on a selection of liturgical objects, symbols and actions that will help the couples better appreciate and understand their celebration of marriage. They are based on Fr Romano Guardini's, *Sacred Signs*, and Fr Whinder's *Sacramentals*, (CTS Do 797).

Hopefully, by looking at the objects, symbols and actions the couple's feelings and imagination will engage and be inspired; this will open them up to the sacred mysteries they are about to enter. We cannot assume that they know or remember simple liturgical gestures, such as making the sign of the cross, genuflection, kneeling or an attitude of reverence. Remember: this is not an unfair imposition on the couples; they have requested marriage in the Catholic Church, and there are standards of behaviour to be observed in a church.

Key points: Make the following points:

- We're now going into the church to explain the meaning and purpose of the different parts of the church, the various religious symbols inside, and the types of actions we use to show our respect towards God's house.
- We also want you to see where you and your family and friends will celebrate the rite of the sacrament of marriage.

Sacred signs

Once inside the church invite the couples to practise the gestures of respect, the sign of the cross and kneeling, when you come to the relevant explanations. Move to the relevant objects and parts as you explain them.

Key points: Make the following points:

- We've already looked at the importance of body language, 'words, music and dance'. Catholics have a special 'body language' that expresses that what we do here is special and meaningful.

- **The church** This is a sacred place where we have the privilege of sharing in God's life and where we share our lives with God. A 'sacred space' means it's been set aside for the worship of God and for our reception of His sacraments. It is not like any other public space, such as a public hall, cinema or theatre. Everything here, the art, the architecture, the objects, communicates one thing – this is a sacred place where God is present. You belong here, this is your church. You have as much right to be here as the priest, deacon, or anyone else. The one thing that is required from is a respectful attitude. So, please turn off your mobiles for the time you are here. Also, during your wedding please ask your friends and family to turn off their mobiles; and to be discreet about how photographs are taken.
- **Sanctuary light** You see that red candle there on the sanctuary? That is lit permanently to remind us all that Jesus is present in the Tabernacle, which is the most holy place in the whole church.
- **Sign of the cross** As a sign of respect, we invite you to make the sign of the cross. When we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross, not a small cramped gesture but a large unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder. Consciously feel how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, the union of our body and soul, every part of us, for men our masculinity, for women our femininity. Why do you think the sign of the cross is so important to Catholics? It blesses us with Jesus' totally self-giving love, reminding us that we are called to show the same love to each other.
- **Genuflection** This is made by touching the ground with one's right or left knee. Catholics genuflect before entering the bench, or going to read from the lectern or to act as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, as a sign of reverence before the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle or on the altar.

On entering a church or in passing before the altar, kneel down all the way without haste or hurry, putting your heart into what you do, and let your whole attitude say, Thou art the great God. (Romano Guardini).

- **Kneeling** It is usual for people to kneel, if they are not disabled, when they first enter their bench as a sign of respect to the presence of Jesus. Kneeling is a sacred sign that shows our recognition of God's power and holiness. When you receive the Nuptial Blessing at the conclusion of the marriage rite you will both be asked to kneel, which expresses your recognition of God's power and purpose for your lives together as husband and wife.

- **Standing** You might think: Why are we talking about standing – we do that without thinking? Like making the sign of the cross and kneeling, standing has a special meaning in the church. Standing means we are attentive to God, ready for action according to his will. We stand when the Gospel is proclaimed by the priest or deacon, we stand when, as godparents at a baptism, we make our proclamation of faith. As a bride and bridegroom you will stand when you make your promises to be faithful to your marriage vows and consent to be married before the altar.
- Now we've looked at our body language, let's look at the meaning of the various **sacred objects** in the church.
- **Candles** Light is one of the essentials of life, and Jesus described himself as 'the light of the world' (John 8:12). A candle is a very simple object, but it has an inherent power and beauty that communicates in a church that this is a holy, sacred place, a place where we share in the life of God, and we share our lives with God and each other.
- **The Altar** This is one of the most important parts of a church, and is often situated on a raised or separate area called the Sanctuary, meaning 'holy place'. It is here that the sacrament of sacraments is celebrated, the sacrifice of the Mass, the consecration of the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Jesus, the real and true presence of God. The altar is also the table of the Lord to which all people are invited, as one family around the family table. (*CCC 1182*).
- **The Tabernacle** As we mentioned earlier, this is also deeply holy, because the Lord is really present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the Body of Jesus. (*CCC 1183*)
- **The Lectern** This is another prominent feature of the church, from which the Word of God contained in the Bible, is proclaimed to the people. As well as being present in the sacraments, we believe that God is present in the living word proclaimed in the church. (*CCC 1184*) As part of your preparation for your marriage you'll be asked to choose passages from the Bible to be read during the rite of marriage.
- **The Baptismal font** In the font people receive the fundamental sacrament of Christian life, baptism, which frees us from Original Sin and joins us, 'grafts us', into the life and graces of Jesus. Hopefully, in due time this is where you will bring your children to become members of God's family. (*CCC 1185*).
- **The Confessionals** The sacrament of reconciliation, involving confession, absolution and penance, is related to baptism, and is another sacrament of healing and life-giving grace. In these confessionals we receive Jesus' forgiveness for our sins, and spiritual advice and encouragement. A very good way of preparing for your wedding day is to go to confession to make a fresh start, which we all need to do from time to time.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to finish the course on a positive note and to encourage the couples to continue in prayer.

Depending on the distance to the church, you may want to return to your usual meeting room or remain in the church to finish.

Key points: Make the following points:

- We have now come to the end of our course. We have covered a lot of material and it has been great to be able to share with you in your preparation for marriage.
- At this point the Presenters may like to add some of their personal highlights from the course.
- As you approach your wedding, do read through the summary material and think and pray about what we have covered together.
- Remember to keep praying the prayer on the summary sheet from the first session.
- To finish I invite you to read the final Blessing with me. This is based on the 'Nuptial' blessing that you will receive at your wedding. 'Nuptial' is another word for 'wedding' and 'marriage'.

Nuptial blessing

Father, by your power you have made everything out of nothing. In the beginning you created the universe and made mankind in your own likeness. You gave man the constant help of women so that man and woman should no longer be two, but one flesh, and you teach us that what you have united may never be divided.

Father, you have made the union of man and woman so holy a mystery that it symbolizes the marriage of Christ and his church.

Look with love upon this woman, your daughter, who is to be joined to her husband in marriage. She asks your blessing. Give her the grace of love and peace. May she always follow the example of the holy women whose praises are sung in the scriptures.

May her husband put his trust in her and recognize that she is his equal and heir with him to the life of grace. May he always honour her and love her as Christ loves his bride, the church.

Father, keep them always true to your commandments. Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life. Give them the strength which comes from the gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others.

Bless them with children and help them to be good parents. May they live to see their children's children. And, after a happy old age, grants them fullness of life with the saints in the kingdom of heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Final points

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm what happens next according to your local custom, e.g. they may now meet with the priest or deacon to select the readings etc. Thank everyone for coming.