

Marriage Preparation Plus Course

Designed to meet the specific needs of 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.

Assumes knowledge of the faith and a living relationship with Christ.

Session 1

Two become one

Preparation before the session

Prayer to Holy Spirit for Catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

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

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

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 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.

Session 1 Two become one

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome (15 mins)	Brief introductions. Input: Overview of 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. Whoever loves knows God (20 mins)	Input: The concept of love in the bible. Activity: Making the link between God's love and us. Review of key Bible passages and discussion covering input on God and love.
4. What is marriage? (30 mins)	Activity: Quick 'opinion quiz'. Couples review statements about marriage followed by group discussion covering input on what the Catholic Church teaches about marriage.
6. Closing words and homework (5 mins)	Input: Reflecting on the Message to Couples.

1. Welcome to Marriage Preparation Plus

Introductions

Presenters introduce themselves.

- If married, name your spouse, how long you've been married, what you do for a living, how many children.
- If a priest or deacon, roughly how many couples have 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 been together.
- When they plan to get married.
- What they expect/hope to get from attending the programme.

If they have not already received, or have forgotten to bring the “Message to Couples” and course overview, hand out copies of these.

Key points: Go through the course overview 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 *Couple's Book*.

2. Getting to know each other

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

- We're all here because we know that love is at the heart of Christianity. Jesus commanded us to love God and to love each other. The love that you share now as engaged couples

and will share as husbands and wives is a special expression of this love. This is why married love has its own sacrament. So, let's start your marriage preparation by talking about love.

- I want you to look at these questions, and talk about them among yourselves for 5 minutes, then we'll come together to share.

Hand-out questions

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. Start with the married presenters.

Key points: Conclusion to section. Make the following points:

- Over these six sessions we're going to be talking about love – how your love as baptised Christians in all its aspects – emotional, sexual, and spiritual – is a special participation in God's love. We hope that the work you do together will also help you understand and deepen your love for each other, and prepare you for receiving the sacrament of marriage on your wedding day.
- *Marriage Preparation Plus* starts from the understanding that God has revealed the meaning and purpose of marriage through Scripture and the Tradition of the Church, as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This will be the primary source of the contents of the Course. We will also draw on the experience of the catechists who are married, who have practical knowledge of living the sacrament of marriage.
- We're here to help you prepare for your marriage because the Catholic Church knows that your personal well being, and the well being of your family and friends, depends on the happiness and success of your marriage. It is the most important thing you will do in your life. 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.
- All your life in the Church you've heard St John's beautiful description of God: 'Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.' (1 John

4:7-8). You are experiencing the unique love that is only shared by a man and woman; now, as you prepare to be married, a whole new understanding of love is opening up to you. Not only do you understand yourselves in new ways, but you also have the opportunity to deepen your understanding and relationship with God.

3. Whoever loves knows God

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

- Every married couple knows that sex is the deepest experience of love that expresses and nourishes the intimacy and closeness of their day-to-day lives. But when we talk about God's love, or Jesus' command to Christians to love, it's common for people to assume it means every expression of love, except sexual love.
- It's as if God's love and Christian love is only spiritual love, brotherly love, love expressed as charity, but never physical attraction, and definitely not sexual, passionate love!
- Maybe this is a hangover from people thinking that sex is naughty and rude, and polite people, like God, don't talk about it in public. Doesn't the Church think sex is bad? Doesn't the Bible say that sex is the result of Adam and Eve's fall?
- Actually, the Bible says that sex is good. Genesis is very clear that God made sex because, 'It is not right that the man should be alone...This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh'. (Genesis 2:18).
- Pope Benedict XVI goes so far as to say that the love between man and woman stands out from all other types of love – love between friends, love between family members, love between parents and children, even love of neighbour and love of God. The Pope says the love between a husband and wife, where body and soul are inseparably joined, is the very epitome of love, that makes all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 2).
- That's all very well to say, but can we find God saying the same thing about the love between a husband and wife?
- 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. 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 merry-makers... 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 passages. 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 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.
- These passages from the Old Testament, and others in the New Testament, have led the Church to understand that the sacrament of marriage, and its unique expression through sexual love, is an image, a sacramental sign, of two essential expressions of God's love:
 - The self-giving love of the inner life of the Holy Trinity.
 - The total, self-giving, unbreakable, faithful love between Jesus and the Church, the Bridegroom and his Bride.
- The passion, commitment and joy you find in loving each other gives you a special understanding, though a limited one, of God's love as the Holy Trinity and Jesus' love for each one of us.

4. What is marriage?

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

- Now we're 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 to marriage.
- Hand out the questionnaire to the couple 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 on their sheets. 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 well being 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 let our personal defences down, it is necessary for there to be complete trust and understanding. That 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's relationship has irretrievably broken down and it is impossible for them to live together, it is OK for them to separate.

- ✓ This question is about the indissolubility of marriage.
- ✓ The answer to this is 'Agree'. The Church permits the physical separation of the couple, but divorce is not an option for Catholics who live up to their marriage vows. (cf. CCC 1626-1640, 1649).
- ✓ 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. 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.

- ✓ Though a couple may choose to physically separate as the very last resort, they do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to divorce or enter into another sexual relationship. Though they are not living in union, they must honour the indissolubility and fidelity of their marriage.
- ✓ 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, it is permissible for a couple to use pornography to spice up their sex lives.

- ✓ 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. Jesus said that if a man looks with lust at a woman he has committed adultery in his heart. (Matthew 5:28) If a couple use pornography they are misusing their sexuality, and being unfaithful to the exclusivity of sexual desire.
- ✓ When you give yourself totally to your husband or wife and accept the gift of the other, there is a body language in sexual love of total trust, total commitment and a promise of faithfulness. If you use pornography you are letting the image of someone else sexually excite you, when only your husband or wife should be the object of your desire. Also, pornography exploits the sexuality of another person, even if they have done it willingly for money. Thus from every perspective, pornography damages something very precious.
- ✓ The sexual act is never a purely biological act; it is always personal and deeply affects the person.
- ✓ Pornography introduces a lie into the language of sexual love between husband and wife, which can upset and distort the intimacy and truth that they had before using pornography.

4. It is OK to get married and agree to only have two children.

- ✓ This question is about the couple being open to fertility.
- ✓ The answer to this question is 'Disagree'. The Church teaches that parents must be responsible about the number and spacing of children through natural fertility awareness, but must not set a limit on the number of children through sterilisation or contraception.

- ✓ Three are involved in the creation of new human life: wife, husband and God. Ultimately, God is the LORD of Life, and he has a caring plan for each couple and their family. If they use contraception or sterilisation, they may stop a human being coming into existence according to God's will. If the conception of other children takes place, the couple needs to be as open to these new lives as they were to the first two, accepting any new child lovingly from God.
- ✓ 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 basic purpose of sex is the physical pleasure and satisfaction of the couple, - children are often considered to be an optional extra or life-style choice. This shows a complete misunderstanding about Christian marriage and an impoverished attitude to sexual love.
- ✓ God says to men and women, 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28).
- ✓ If a couple intend to have children, but due to infertility cannot conceive children, the intention is enough to make it a marriage as real and true as one that has children. (*CCC 1654*).

5. Closing words and homework

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

- On your session summary you will find notes about this session. In the time before the next session, please read over these notes and pray about them.
- Also, in the message to couples there are some points for reflection. Take time to read these and complete the reflection as a couple.

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 Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

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Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

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

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

Read through the Presenters' 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 couples' 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. 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, 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 (10 mins)	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.
6. Closing words and homework (5 mins)	Input: St Paul's description of love.

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this session 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 you filled in a questionnaire called, “What is marriage?” which we used to discuss the four essential qualities of marriage. Let’s see, as a group, if we can name the four elements.
- I’ll read out four definitions, and I want you to 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 we’re going to look at how we imagine living the sacrament of marriage will be different from being single and engaged. Sacraments are more than social rites of passage; they are the ways chosen by God to strengthen us and inspire us to live the various dimensions of our lives ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit’.
- We’re also going to look more closely at what love is, particularly the love between wife and husband. How many times have we heard the word ‘love’ used in the Church and Catholic schools since we were children? Today we’ll have the opportunity to look in more depth at this much used word.
- Then we’re going to talk about the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as the secrets of a happy marriage and sure protection against the threats to marriage posed by the deadly or capital sins.

- The overall objective of this session is to consider the ways married love will become your shared way of growing into holiness.
- If hearing the word ‘holiness’ makes you uneasy or quizzical don’t worry! ‘Holiness’ isn’t a joyless, pinched existence that frowns on sex and the simple joys of life, but the fullness and exuberance of a life that is growing more and more open, through the Holy Spirit, to the truth, goodness and beauty of Jesus Christ. Living the sacrament of marriage is your way of deeper participation in the life of the Holy Trinity. Marriage is that important!

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?” 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 a relief to be able to share everything about myself with someone I completely trust.
- At last we’ll be able to fully express our sexual love and desire for each other.
- I’ll be able to share my personal relationship with God with someone else.
- Standing together as wife and husband before the Altar of God is going to be very special.
- When I’m married I’ll know what my place is in God’s plan for my life.
- 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 helps us really enjoy deeply the good times.
- 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 it might 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:

- Catholic marriage is different from the single or engaged state because it opens up a whole new world of intimacy, both physical and spiritual. Just as you'll learn about each other's bodies and the mutual pleasures of sex, you'll also learn more about each other's spiritual lives and past experiences that have shaped them.
- The difference between physical intimacy and spiritual intimacy is that as engaged couples you are free to share your spiritual lives as deeply as you want, while, if you are obeying the Church's teaching, you'll abstain from sexual intercourse until your marriage.
- If you are not praying together yet, it's really important for your relationship to find ways of praying with which you are both comfortable. If you have no experience of praying with others, apart from the liturgy, it may take a while to get used to it. The key thing is don't worry about it and take it gradually. One good way of starting to pray together is to pray the morning and evening prayer of the Church [The Divine Office of the Church].
- Also, praying together is meant to supplement and deepen your prayer life, not replace your times of individual prayer, which will remain important.
- The promise to stay together forever will give you an amazing sense of freedom and security, essential to being able to totally trust each other about your physical and spiritual needs. This sense of trust and security is also needed for you both to be able to reveal any possible emotional, psychological and spiritual 'wounds' from your past that need the healing, and that only your love for each other can give.

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 knew that Thomas got his strength to face imprisonment in the Tower from prayer and his faith. His faith gave him the courage to endure being taken from her and the children, to face death on his own. All he had to do was say a couple of words, even if he didn't mean them, and the King would let him come back to her. But Thomas wouldn't say words that were a lie and he wouldn't collaborate in an evil act that went against the good of the country and the truth of the faith handed down by the apostles. St Thomas More was executed in London in 1535.

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 the English only has one word for love - 'Love'. Other languages have many words to describe the different types of love; e.g. Eskimos have more than one word for 'snow.'
- The Greeks had four words for four different types of love – affection, friendship, erotic love, and self-giving love.
- 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.
- Affection is also a dimension of love shown by God towards humanity, best expressed in these words of Jesus, 'How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing...' (Matthew 23:37).
- 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, '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 15:12-13). Self-giving love puts the needs of the other before your own needs.
 - Though in all likelihood none of us here will have to face Alice and Thomas More's choice, there will come times in your marriage when you will face the choice of sacrificing your own needs or happiness for the needs and happiness of your spouse and children. You may be exhausted or sick, or have really set your heart on something, and you will be called to make a sacrifice for the good of your husband or wife or children. Such love involves turning against yourself, your own comfort and needs, in order to turn outwards towards the needs of others. If you make such sacrifices you'll know that you love them more than you love yourself.
 - The greatest example of self-giving love is Jesus' life of service and obedience to God's will and his death on the Cross to save each one of us from our sins.

"His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. John 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of ... "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 12.)

- 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 sexual relations 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.
- As Pope Benedict puts it, erotic love is part of our nature and directs or orientates us towards marriage, to a personal union that is unique and definitive. Marriage is the fulfilment of the deepest purpose of erotic love. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 11).
- Sexual love isn't just about physical stimulation and pleasure, though these are important and good things; it is also about personal meaning – as an expression of tenderness, of joy, 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 that blights so many lives – 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'. The harm caused by this all too common misuse of sexual love is compounded when it leads to unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and the physical, psychological and spiritual suffering that results for the individuals concerned and wider society.
- 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.
- In the first session we discovered that God expresses his love for humanity in erotic terms, which can leave some feeling uncomfortable, even shocked. But one of the things that Creation and the Incarnation tell us is that the 'physical' is important to God; it's not an afterthought or second best. Erotic love is one of the strongest experiences of our physical nature, so it's not surprising that God uses erotic imagery to communicate powerful truths to us. As Pope Benedict puts it, 'Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa'. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 11).

- 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.
- The first 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.
- Friendship is also important in our relationship with God. In the Old Testament, Moses is described as ‘God’s friend’ because God called Moses to go up Mount Sinai so they could talk together. (Exodus 33:11). And Jesus told the Apostles, ‘I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends...’(John 15:15).
- As baptized Christians you are already friends of Jesus, but when you receive the sacrament of marriage your friendship with our Lord will enter a new phase.
- We need God’s help to make the major sacrifices of life, to help us overcome our natural self-centeredness and weakness. As you know, this is one of the purposes of the sacraments, to give us the graces we need to overcome our tendency to sin. You already have the sacramental assistance of Baptism, Confession, the Eucharist and Confirmation, and now you’re about to receive God’s special grace for couples through the Sacrament of Marriage.

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 material and match them to 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.	

Virtue	Description	Ranking of importance
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.	

Vice	Description	Ranking
Modesty	Purity of heart that protects the intimate privacy of the person with patience, decency and discretion.	

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 used 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 reread this passage together.
- Think about “What will we do differently as a result of this 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 Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

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

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

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.

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 I'd like us to do as a group is give a definition of these four types of love. (To lead this recap section it is advisable for the presenters to re-familiarise themselves with the definitions given in the last session (2)
 - What is affection?
 - What is erotic love?
 - What is self-giving love?
 - What is friendship?

Objectives of today's session:

Key points: Make the following points:

- Today we're going to look at the differences between women and men, and how God created masculinity and femininity to be complementary and a source of mutual enrichment and fulfilment.
- As well as these God-given differences being one of the sources of your marriage's strength and richness, they can also cause misunderstanding, conflict and hurt, making us vulnerable to temptation and sin.
- 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 will also look at the importance of forgiveness for a healthy marriage and the benefit of frequent recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation.

2. Respect the differences between men and women

The objective of this section is to help the couples deepen their appreciation of the revelation that God is the source of the differences between men and women, and that the communion of marriage is a profound experience of our humanity, made in the image and likeness of God. It aims to counter the popular belief that masculinity and femininity are merely socially conditioned, or life-style choices.

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 gender 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 gender, but just 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.
- In your couples discuss the following questions:
 - 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 10 - 2 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 Book of Genesis tells us that God intentionally created human beings as male and female:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply..." (Genesis 1:27-28)

- This tells us that male and female are different but complementary 'images' of God, and that the full image of God is found in their communion. Simply put, it is in marriage that we find the full image of God in human experience!
- This is one of the reasons why marriage is a sacrament. A sacrament is a sign that makes visible and active a dimension of God's reality in our lives. As a sacrament, Jesus also gives special grace to the couple to help them live out the goodness, truth and beauty of marriage.
- The amazing thing to realise is that it is the union of masculinity and femininity, with all their complementary differences, that is the sign that makes the image of God fully visible in human life.
- Before we look at why your marriage will have this wonderful privilege and dignity of being a sign of the image of God, we need to understand what being made in the image and likeness of God means.
- This is what the *Catechism* says:

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (CCC 357).

- As we see here, being in the ‘image and likeness’ of God gives us our capacity for self-knowledge, self-possession, self-giving through personal communion and our capacity, through grace, to enter into a special relationship [covenant] with God.
- Now we begin to see why marriage is the fullest expression of the image of God. Marriage is the most intense expression of love, in its four aspects, which involves a constant disclosure and sharing of thoughts, emotions and bodies. This personal and intimate experience of unity in diversity of femaleness and maleness is a touch of the divine in our lives.
- Pope John Paul II also draws this breath-taking conclusion – that your experience of intimate unity in diversity has its origin in the inner life of the Trinity, most especially through the procreation of children, unique human persons!

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 of 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 young, 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 time 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 underlying feelings; put yourself in the speaker’s position.
 - **Awareness:** Be aware of our tendency to distort, and 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 of positive speaking in marriage is to make sure that you say positive things to each other regularly. 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, that would be a good example to use here.*)

- 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 them (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, 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 them to the activity in their *Couple’s Book*.
- 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 and 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 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 another, 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 the couples to list examples and write them on the right hand side of a flipchart titled “responses”*). Examples: shout, walk away, ignore, and 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: Resolving conflicts

- Working in pairs, take a couple of 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 (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’s/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, for example 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. Example:
 - **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 deepen the couples' sense of sin and the need for mutual forgiveness and frequent recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation for the good of the marriage.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Marriage, as a deeply personal relationship, shows us both the grandeur and tragedy of the human condition. As we discussed earlier, marriage is the fullest expression of our dignity as persons made in the image and likeness of God, but marriage can also become the worst example of the harm caused by sin, for example, the high incidence of domestic violence, with all its bullying and cruelty.
- As it says in the Catechism, reflecting on the effect of Original Sin on the relationship between husbands and wives:

According to faith the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the nature of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations; their mutual attraction, the Creator's own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust... To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them "in the beginning." (CCC 1607-1608)

- Though we have been freed from Original Sin by Baptism, we have to live with the consequences which have weakened our capacity to do good and have left us with a tendency towards evil and sin.
- As St Paul said, 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.' (Romans 7:15).
- Ask the couples: What type of sins do you think most hurt a marriage?
- The first step to protecting your marriage from sin is for both of you to realise that even though you love each other deeply, you have an inherent tendency to be selfish and sinful, which explains the truism 'we hurt the ones we love the most'.
- The second step to protecting your marriage from sin is to renew your basic Christian commitment to forgiveness.
- Read the passages of scripture.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:12-14

Then Peter went up to him and said, "How many times must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy seven times." Matthew 18:21-22

- The key element in both these references is that we are called to forgive as God forgives us and to go on doing it 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.
- Praying and working together to sort out those things that affect your friendship can make the relationship stronger than ever and much more satisfying and fulfilling.
- 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.
- Finally, an important way of learning to forgive each other is through frequently receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Not only do we receive God's forgiveness for the harm we have done to our marriage through sin, but we receive the grace to avoid sin in the future. Through experiencing God's forgiveness, we gradually become more forgiving ourselves.
- When marriages go through rocky patches, couples are often encouraged to go to marriage counsellors. Now this may be necessary, depending on the seriousness of the problems, but the first source of help for Catholics should be seeking forgiveness and healing through the Sacrament of Confession. God wants to help us have successful marriages.

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. Handout 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 the answers. Depending on the group decide if you want to have final scores!
- For your 'homework' this time reread the bible passages we have looked at today.
- Think about "What will we do differently as a result of this session?"

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 Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

(cf. Introduction to Marriage Preparation Course):

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

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)	Input: How to read the Genesis account Activity: Review passages on creation to determine what they teach us about being made in God's image including input on the Church's teaching.
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.
6. 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.
- For the start of this session I'd like you to tell us what you remember about:
 - The importance of these differences to us being made in the image of God. And
 - What marriage has got to do with us being made in the image of God.
- Spend a few minutes discussing what you remember and then we'll discuss them as a group.

The answers to these questions are found at the end of the first activity; "Respect the differences between men and women".

Objectives of today's session

- Last time we talked about the differences between men and women, this session we're going to look more deeply at the purpose behind God creating us 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.
- We'll also 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 help the couples think more deeply about God's revelation that our bodies are made in the image of divine love, which is the source of the dignity and value of masculinity and femininity. 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 acceptable to use contraception and IVF.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we're going to look further at what God has revealed about our bodies inherent meaning and purpose as male and female, and how this meaning and purpose is expressed in marriage.
- First, we're going to read together a selection of extracts from the Book of Genesis about the creation of the first man and the first woman. Then you'll split into couples and discuss questions about the texts, and finally we'll come together to share our thoughts.
- Before reading the extracts from the Book of Genesis it may help to recap the approach the Catholic Church takes to this section of the Bible.
- The first things to realise is that the authors of Genesis, inspired by God, didn't intend to write a work of history or science as we understand those disciplines today. So when Genesis says God created the world in six days, formed Adam from clay, and made Eve from one of his ribs, the authors are not relating literal historical or scientific facts.
- The *Catechism* makes it clear that the Old Testament accounts of creation go beyond the questions of the natural sciences into the realm of meaning. The purpose of Old Testament accounts of creation is to make profound realities graspable to human beings.
- So when we read Genesis today we must ask the questions, 'what profound reality about

Thus Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of plant life gradually appeared or how the sun and moon and the stars were established. Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: God created the world...all of this comes from one power, from God's eternal Reason, which became – in the Word – the power of creation. (Cardinal Ratzinger, 'In the Beginning', p.5)

being men and women is God trying to tell us? What is the divine meaning He has given masculinity and femininity?

Extracts from the Book of Genesis

- In your pairs, turn to the material on Creation and take 10 minutes to answer the questions 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.

You will want to make the following points when discussing the couples' answers. Spend approximately 5 minutes on each question.

First account of creation

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1:26-28)

Second account of creation

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed...

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2: 7-8, 18-25)

- What do these extracts tell us about human beings being different from animals?
 - The references to being made 'in the image of God' and God breathing the 'spirit of life' into Adam's nostrils helps us grasp that we are a union of body and soul.
 - The body isn't a machine inhabited by a soul, but an inseparable union of physical body and spiritual soul.
 - Our image and likeness to God resides in this spiritual reality, our soul, but our body also shares in the dignity of the 'image of God'. We have human bodies, and not animal bodies, because they are animated by a spiritual soul created by God.

- Nowadays we don't hear much talk about the soul being the seat of our identity; it's all been reduced to brains and brain chemistry. But the reality of each person having a soul conveys the truth revealed by God that we're made in his image and that he breathes his spirit into us.
- What is a soul? It refers to our interior life, the inner-most aspect of a human being, our self-possession, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. (CCC 362-368).
- 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.
- The importance of the 'heart' in Catholic spirituality is seen in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the wounded heart of Mary. The total, self-giving love of Jesus for sinful human beings is conveyed by the iconography of his divine heart exposed to our gaze and suffering the wounds of our sins not in condemnation or retribution but in the humility of love.
- 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', of being a 'soul' is the love you have for each other.
- Also, because we are made in the image and likeness of God, we have been given the capacity to receive God's self-communication, his revelation and his grace. This capacity to have communion with God involves our whole being, body and soul united. This means we cannot treat our bodies in ways that are contrary to God's will, as if they were 'no go' areas for God.
- What do these extracts tell us about the relationship between men and women?
 - One thing it doesn't tell us is that man is superior to woman. The image of Eve being formed from Adam's rib is not about woman's dependence of man but about complementarity, about completing each other through a natural union.
 - Genesis says God saw that man was lonely without a helpmate, that he needed another. None of the animals could fill this gap of loneliness. We cannot exist in isolation, we are not self-sufficient. Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.
 - In creating human beings, male and female, God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, though in a different and complementary way. And as we discussed in the last session, it is that personal union of masculine and feminine differences in marriage that fully conveys the image of God.

- The phrase, 'I shall make a helper for man, as a partner for him', can also be translated as an 'opposite to him'. This means that God has created men and women to be opposites turned in each other's direction and specifically made to encounter each other and fit together.
- This personal reality of being created as opposites made to fit together is reflected in the biological structures of male and female bodies. The physical reflects the spiritual, and vice versa.
- What do these extracts tell us about the purpose and meaning of sexual love?
 - God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.
 - Reflecting on Genesis, 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).
 - The phrases, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' and 'and they become one flesh' mean three important things in the Bible:
- The sexual act between husband and wife creates a bond as close as a blood relationship between members of a family, with the obligation of living together in peace.
- That husband and wife are complementary and complete each other.
- The physical, marital union between man and woman forms one shared life as if they are one person.
 - Another sentence that's important to look at is, 'And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed'. It is this freedom from shame about our nakedness that makes possible the sincere gift of self possible through the bodiliness of sexual love.
 - We came across the term, body language in the last session. You will remember it 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 the marital act 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 statement that the body language between wife and

husband makes is, “I love every aspect of you so much that I am open to giving life to a child 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.’
- The ultimate expression of our self-gift in marriage is the procreation of children, 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 held personal union, that is indissoluble, faithful and open to life.

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 IVF 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* 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 come back into the group and go through the reasons they 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, CTS, 2007). Make into Footnote.

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 sexual love not only very good, and to be enjoyed, but also because it is one of the most powerful and intimate ways of giving and receiving love between husbands and wives.

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

- 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. The exact details of this technique are 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 pregnancy

- 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 Natural Fertility Awareness and contraception 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 has been with IVF, all kinds of gravely immoral acts follow. For example experimentation on embryonic human beings, sex 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. In the Catechism it 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 high note of having children.

Key points: Make the following points:

- When you make your marriage vows during your wedding you will make the following promise: Are you 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', 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 at all easy! You will probably need more time to reflect on what we have covered.
- For 'homework' read the summary material, reflect on the bible passages we have read today and think about "What will we do as a result of this 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 Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

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

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

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 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.

Session 5 A little help from my friends

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 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 and vices (self-giving love (or charity), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity); (pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth).
- Listening and speaking effectively.
- Resolving conflicts.

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:

- Today 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 today's session

- Every sacrament in the Catholic Church, including marriage, puts us in touch with Jesus Christ, so first it's important we're clear what we mean when we say Jesus was true God and true man.
- Then we'll look at what exactly a sacrament is, and how sacraments help us in general, and how the sacrament of marriage will help you in particular through the graces specific to marriage.
- 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 help the couples think about their faith in Jesus: who is he? What are the ways he is present in our lives? How does he make our lives different? What does he want from us in our marriage as Christians? What the couple believe about Jesus determines what they believe they are doing when they make their marriage vows, and ultimately how they engage with the sacrament of marriage.

Key points: Make the following points:

- When you make your marriage vows on the day of your wedding you will enter a new phase in your relationship with each other. You will also enter a new phase in your relationship with Jesus.

- 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 living your life.

Who do you say Jesus is?

- In our first activity you're going to look at a number of statements to help you think about who Jesus is in your life.

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 on their sheets.

Key points: Make the following points:

1. As God, Jesus pretended to be human, only pretending to be weak and to suffer.

- The answer is 'Strongly disagree'.
- This question is about the importance of the incarnation. It deals with why God the Son became flesh and why he instituted the sacraments as a continuation of his physical incarnation. (CCC 456-478).
- Every week when we pray the Nicene Creed at Mass we say, 'For us men and our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man'.
- The Son of God assumed a full human nature that is like us in all things, except sin.
- By doing so God made all aspects of human nature – physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual – the medium to communicate divine life and truth to us. As the *Catechism* puts it, 'In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity.' (CCC 470).
- This means a number of amazing things:
- God has assumed the nature of one of his creatures, making it part of the inner life of the Trinity.
- We can now become partakers of the divine nature because we share our human nature with the Son of God, 'For the Son of God became man so that we might become God'. (CCC 460).
- If Jesus only pretended to be human it means that our human nature has not been saved. It means Jesus' life as a human being did not communicate the truth about God and it means that we cannot become partakers in the divine nature because he was never one of us.

- Jesus instituted the sacraments to continue the effectiveness of his physical human nature as the medium of communicating the truth and power of God in our lives. As Pope St Leo the Great puts it, 'what was visible in our Saviour has passed over into his mysteries [sacraments]. (CCC 1115).
- When you receive the sacrament of marriage you are truly physically and spiritually in touch with Jesus, true God and true man.

2. It's OK not to want to become a saint.

- The answer is, 'Strongly disagree'. This question is about the fundamental meaning and purpose of human life and the whole point of Christian life, which is to become holy through co-operating with the graces of Jesus. (CCC 2012-2016).
- Leon Bloy, a 20th century French Catholic, said 'the only tragedy in life is not to become a saint'.
- This might seem to most of us to be hopelessly idealistic and a counsel of impossible perfection, but do any of us disagree that we're supposed to try to think, feel and behave like Jesus? This is what being a 'saint' means. As St Paul expresses it, 'putting on the mind of Christ'.
- It's *not* impossible for us to live like Jesus because he is God. The very reason that we can live like Jesus is because he is God and gives us the gifts [graces] through the sacraments to live like him.
- The graces we receive through the sacraments, if we co-operate with them, mould us and educate us to become more and more like Jesus.
- As it says in the *Catechism*:

Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called "mystical" because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments -- "the holy mysteries" -- and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him (CCC 2014)

- Therefore, it's not OK not to want to become a saint, because what this actually means is that you don't want to live like Jesus in your life!

3. When we receive a sacrament, such as the Eucharist and Marriage, Jesus is as real and present to us as he was to the apostles, but in a different way.

- The answer is 'Strongly agree'.
- This question is about how Jesus is really and truly present in the sacraments (CCC 1084-1085).

- The sacraments are not human inventions or merely the celebrations of rites of passage but sacred words and actions instituted by Jesus to communicate his life to us.
- The sacraments are not a historical re-enactment, like the re-enactment of an English Civil War battle; rather, they enable us to encounter the living mysteries of Our Lord.
- Uniquely, Jesus' human acts cannot be merely something of the historical past, like Caesar's conquest of Gaul or the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. This is a consequence of the Son of God becoming a human being, known as the Incarnation.
- During his earthly existence, the words and deeds of Jesus were the actions of a man who was the incarnate Son of God. This means that every word and deed of Jesus transcends time and space because God is eternal. The *Catechism* explains it as follows:

Sacraments are "powers that come forth" from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are "the masterworks of God" in the new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1116)

4. It's possible for our love as husband and wife to represent the love of Jesus for his people

- The answer is 'Strongly agree'.
- This question is about the unique meaning and purpose Jesus has given the marriage of Christians, which has a private significance for the couple and a public significance for the Church. (CCC 1612-1617).
- As we saw in the first session, God has used the image of erotic love and marriage to convey the depth and passion of his love for the human race.
- This divine understanding of marriage was used to convey and explain another important aspect of God's relationship with Israel, the covenant, which is a bond between two parties which establishes a permanent relationship with duties and privileges.
- Marriage between husband and wife came to be seen as a covenant of love that established a community of love.
- With these powerful associations between God's love and human marriage it is easy to see how every marriage could be seen as having the potential of representing God's love.
- St Paul was inspired to make this role of marriage explicit, when he described Christ's self-giving love for the Church:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

(Ephesians 5: 25, 31-32)

- It would be a sad mistake to think this meant we had to be solemn and serious all the time in our marriages!
- What it means is that your friendship, commitment, faithfulness, and openness to life are a visible 'symbol' pointing to the reality of Jesus' solidarity, faithfulness and life-giving power in the Church.
- This is seen in simple things like joined hands, enjoying each other's company, self-sacrifice, pushing a pram or a wheel chair.
- It's important that you learn to see that the natural rhythms of your sacramental marriage really make visible the love of Jesus.
- This is how Cardinal Walter Kasper puts it:

Your sacramental marriage is not merely a model or example of Jesus' love for the Church... but a copy of that mystery that has grown out of the union of Christ with the Church and is borne up by and penetrated with that union. Marriage does not merely symbolise that mystery, it really represents it in itself and represents it by showing itself to be active and effective in it.

(Walter Kasper, Theology of Christian Marriage, p. 37)

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. 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 a shared weekend - something you associate with an interest or hobby of your girlfriend/boyfriend - e.g. an article of clothing, or music.

After about 5 minutes, when the couples are back in the group, go round and ask them 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, and communicate and make real the person we love; they represent the other person and cause us to 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 accomplish exactly what they signify. The symbol of Baptism is water, which represents life and being clean, but the sacrament of Baptism 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 means 'gift'. However, it's not the gift of an object or thing, but 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, for the sacrament of marriage you must have the free consent of a man and a woman, which is then consummated through the sexual act. 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 makes the two into one.
- What aspect of Jesus' life does the union of husband and wife make present in your lives and the life of the Church? Simply put, 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 to 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.
- However, this is not being idealistic or naive, but reflects 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 earlier (Session 2) at how you are going to combine your two lives when you get married 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 to any event will be the same as that of your girlfriend/boyfriend.
- We are going to look at how you as a couple deal with change.

Invite the couples to turn to the Dealing with Change activity and in their 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, as a couple compare notes with each other. 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 or 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 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 preserve, 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 net work 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 covered quite a lot of material today: 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 and think about what we have covered.

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 Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

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

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

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.

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.

Session 6 Loving each other in Christ

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session (5 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions. Input: Brief overview of session.
2. Promises before God and his Church (20 mins)	Activity: Match the promise in the Marriage Rite with the essential qualities of marriage. Input: read through the consent section of the Marriage service.
3. Marriages are made in prayer. (25 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
6. 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.

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:
 - It is not the priest or deacon who confers the sacrament but you, yourselves.
 - The marriage rite as prayer, and how it is the foundation of your family as a domestic Church.
- We will also go through the rite of marriage in the Church
- Finally, we will undertake a meditation on the significance of liturgical signs, to enable you to be fully aware of the meaning of every liturgical action so as to participate at a deeper level in your conferring of the sacrament of marriage.

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 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.

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

Promise from Marriage Rite	Essential quality of Marriage
Are you ready freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage? Bridegroom: I am. Bride: I am.	(Personal union)
Are you ready to love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives? Bridegroom: I am. Bride: I am.	(Indissolubility)
Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church? Bridegroom: I am. Bride: I am.	(Openness to fertility)
Bridegroom and Bride: 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.	(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 before 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 inappropriate intimate relations with another man or woman, and you are promising that you’ll lovingly welcome whatever children God gives you. These promises are binding until the death of the other partner.

- 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 freely 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 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- The day you both receive the sacrament of marriage from each other is also the day when you are given the capability to form a ‘domestic church’.

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. [domestic church]. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are “by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.” (CCC 1656).

4. Liturgical meditation on the meaning of your marriage

The purpose of this section is to take the couples into the church and lead a meditation on the meaning and significance of liturgical actions and objects. This will help deepen their awareness of the sacred mystery they will participate in as ministers of the sacrament of marriage to each other. (The meditations are based on Fr Romano Guardini's, *Sacred Signs*, and Fr Whinder's *Sacramentals*, (CTS Do 797)).

Key points: Make the following points:

- Since we were children we've gone to church, and been surrounded by liturgical actions, symbols and objects. So much so, that we can often take them for granted, even do them without thinking.
- The goal of this liturgical meditation in the church is to help you look at everything anew, in order to help you understand and participate at a deeper level during the rite of marriage.
- **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. The sign of the Cross consecrates and sanctifies us because it is the sign of our redemption. By the cross Jesus sanctifies man to the last shred and fibre of His being. We make the sign of the cross before we pray to collect and compose ourselves and fix our minds and hearts and wills upon God. When you receive the Nuptial Blessing by the priest or deacon, he will make the sign of the cross over you in order that the fullness of God's life may flow into your souls and fructify and sanctify you fully. It blesses us with Jesus' totally self-giving love, reminding us that we are called to show the same love to each other.
- **Genuflection.** We genuflect before entering the bench where we are going to sit, 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 does our littleness so come home to us as when we stand in God’s presence? He is the great God, who is today and yesterday, whose years are hundreds and thousands, who fills the place where we are, the city, the wide world, the measureless space of the starry sky, in whose eyes the universe is less than a particle of dust, all holy, all pure, all righteous, infinitely high. He is so great, I so small, so small beside him. One has no need to be told that God’s presence is not the place in which to stand on one’s dignity’. (Romano Guardini).

- It is a humbling thing to realise that almighty God has chosen men and women to represent his faithful, life-giving love through their living the sacrament of marriage. When you receive the Nuptial Blessing at the conclusion of the marriage rite you will be asked to kneel, which expresses your recognition of God’s power and purpose for your lives together as husband and wife.
- **Standing.** 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. ‘Standing is the other side of reverence towards God. Kneeling is the side of worship in rest and quietness; standing is the side of vigilance and action. It is the respect of the servant in attendance, of the soldier on duty, the parent looking after a child. 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. You will stand as a couple ready to do the will of the Lord in their service of love and their service of life.
- **Hands.** As we saw when discussing God’s body talk, we are a union of body and soul.

‘Every part of the body is an expressive instrument of the soul. The soul does not inhabit the body as a man inhabits a house. It lives and works in each member, each fibre, and reveals itself in the body’s every line, contour and movement. But the soul’s chief instruments and clearest mirrors are the face and hands. Instantly, every slightest feeling – pleasure, surprise, love – shows in the hands.’ (Romano Guardini).

- During the marriage rite your hands play a vital role, expressing the giving and receiving of your bodies and souls, one to the other, during your giving of consent when you confer the sacrament of marriage on each other. As Bride and Bridegroom you join your right hands when the Groom gives his consent. Then you will separate your hands for a moment and then rejoin them as the Bride gives her consent. There is greatness and beauty in this language of the hands. The Church tells us that God has given us our hands in order that we may ‘carry our souls’ in them. During the rite of marriage each receive the most precious of gifts, the care of each other’s body and soul.

- **Walking.** One of the most beautiful and spiritual of walks during a religious occasion is the bride's procession to stand next to her bridegroom. Your procession is so full of religious meaning, as we see in the Old Testament and New Testament, but simply put, your walk symbolises the dignity and nobility of marriage between woman and man.

"And when the occasion is religious, what a beautiful thing walking can be! It is a genuine act of divine worship. Merely to walk into a church in reverent awareness that we are entering the house of the Most High, and in a special manner into his presence, may be 'to walk before the Lord.'" (Romano Guardini).

- In a similar way, the procession as you both leave the Church as husband and wife is so moving and meaningful; full of joy and hope.
- **Symbols:** You marry before the great symbols of holiness in the Church, that can be traced back to Abraham and Sarah, Moses on Mount Sinai, and Jesus in the Jordan, Temple, and Calvary – the Altar, Tabernacle, Lectern, Baptismal font and Confessional.
- **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*)
- **The Baptismal font.** In the font people receive the fundamental sacrament of Christian life, baptism, which frees them from Original Sin and joins them, 'grafts them', 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, 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.

Depending on how far away you are from 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 experiences from the course.
- As you approach your wedding do re-read through the Couple's Book and think and pray about what we have covered.
- To finish I invite you to pray the final Blessing with me. This is based on the Nuptial Blessing that you will receive at your wedding.

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.

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 to select the readings etc. Thank everyone for coming.

Key texts on marriage from the Church's teaching

Marriage and the family form the domestic church

...in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony by which they signify and share (cf. Eph. 5:32) the mystery of the unity and faithful love between Christ and the Church, Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing of their children. Hence by reason of their state in life and of their position they have their own gifts in the People of God (cf. 1 Co 7:7). From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries. In what might be regarded as the domestic Church, the parents, by word and example are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They must foster the vocation which is Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state -- though each in his own way -- are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect. (*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

Consent and indissolubility

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

Children and love of the couple

By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love “are no longer two, but one flesh” (Matt. 19:6), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

Divine love and marriage

Christ the Lord abundantly blessed this many-faceted love, welling up as it does from the fountain of divine love and structured as it is on the model of His union with His Church. For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Saviour of people and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

Human love

The biblical Word of God several times urges the betrothed and the married to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection. Many people of our own age also highly regard true love between husband and wife as it manifests itself in a variety of ways depending on the worthy customs of various peoples and times.

This love is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will; it involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love God has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity. Such love, merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift providing itself by gentle affection and by deed; such love pervades the whole of their lives: indeed by its busy generosity it grows better and grows greater. Therefore it far excels mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

Children are the basic purpose of marriage

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, “it is not good for man to be alone” (*Gn* 2:18) and “Who made man from the beginning male and female” (*Mt* 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: “Increase and multiply” (*Gn* 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Saviour, Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50).

Why contraception is wrong

For God, the Lord of life, has conferred on people the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life in a manner which is worthy of man. Therefore from the moment of its conception life must be guarded with the greatest care while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes. The sexual characteristics of man and the human faculty of reproduction wonderfully exceed the

dispositions of lower forms of life. Hence the acts themselves which are proper to conjugal love and which are exercised in accord with genuine human dignity must be honoured with great reverence. Hence when there is question of harmonising conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspects of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practised.

Relying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law.⁽¹⁴⁾ All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of human beings. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 51).

The four essential qualities of married love

Personal union

This love is above all fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. It is not, then, merely a question of natural instinct or emotional drive. It is also, and above all, an act of the free will, whose trust is such that it is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfillment.

It is a love which is total -- that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions and not thinking solely of their own convenience.

Indissoluble

Whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself.

Married love is also faithful and exclusive of all other, and this until death. This is how husband and wife understood it on the day on which, fully aware of what they were doing, they freely vowed themselves to one another in marriage.

Faithful

Though this fidelity of husband and wife sometimes presents difficulties, no one has the right to assert that it is impossible; it is, on the contrary, always honorable and meritorious. The example of countless married couples proves not only that fidelity is in accord with the nature of marriage, but also that it is the source of profound and enduring happiness.

Open to fertility

Finally, this love is fecund. It is not confined wholly to the loving interchange of husband and wife; it also contrives to go beyond this to bring new life into being. “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents’ welfare.” (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 9).

Natural Fertility Awareness

The sexual activity, in which husband and wife are intimately and chastely united with one another, through which human life is transmitted, is, as the recent Council recalled, “noble and worthy.” It does not, moreover, cease to be legitimate even when, for reasons independent of their will, it is foreseen to be infertile. For its natural adaptation to the expression and strengthening of the union of husband and wife is not thereby suppressed. The fact is, as experience shows, that new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse. God has wisely ordered laws of nature and the incidence of fertility in such a way that successive births are already naturally spaced through the inherent operation of these laws. The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life. (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 11).

Inseparable connection between procreation and sexual love

This particular doctrine, often expounded by the magisterium of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.

The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life -- and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called. We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason. (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 12).

How marriage is a sacrament

Like each of the seven sacraments, so also marriage is a real symbol of the event of salvation, but in its own way. “The spouses participate in it as spouses, together, as a couple, so that the first and immediate effect of marriage (*res et sacramentum*) is not supernatural grace itself, but the Christian conjugal bond, a typically Christian communion of two persons because it

represents the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the mystery of His covenant. The content of participation in Christ's life is also specific: conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter- appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility (cf *Humanae vitae*, 9). In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values." (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13).

The importance of indissolubility

Conjugal communion is characterised not only by its unity but also by its indissolubility: "As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them."

It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly, as the Synod Fathers did, the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. To all those who, in our times, consider it too difficult, or indeed impossible, to be bound to one person for the whole of life, and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity, it is necessary to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ its foundation and strength.

Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in His revelation: He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church. (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13).