



JOINED IN LOVE
ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK PRE-CANA PROGRAM

**Congratulations on your decision to join in love in the vocation of marriage,
and to get married in the Catholic Church!**

Thank you for journeying with us in preparing for your new life together in Holy Matrimony. You have completed a number of activities thus far that should help you transition from two individuals into a newly-married Catholic couple. We are very privileged to be a part of your preparation journey.

Today you are attending the Pre-Cana. Our hope is that you leave today with a sense of how sacred your upcoming Catholic marriage is. We hope you have absorbed the knowledge and skills that, combined with your commitment, will serve you all of your married life.

Please know that this journey you have been on with us is not just a new social exercise. The Catholic Church requires that you be prepared and formed in both the faith and the realities of married life before you consent to marriage and promise your lifelong vows.

As part of today's program, you have received this Guidebook. It will guide you through the day and be used for the discussions and exercises. You will be asked to write in the guidebook about your thoughts and feelings, and about your upcoming life. Couples save many things from their wedding: pictures, videos, cards, the wedding dress, a piece of the wedding cake, etc. We hope and pray that you will save this guidebook as a point of reflection and/or a link to other resources that can enhance and strengthen your marriage.

Please know that we do not want our journey with you to end here today. Our plan is to keep in touch with you (if you want) via email and social media to inform you of events that can deepen your relationship with each other and with God. We hope that we can help you transition from single worshippers to worshipping as a married couple within a parish.

Finally, please know the Family Life Office is here to help you. You can always check our website, archny.org/family-life, for the latest information or as a means to contact us.

Again, congratulations and God bless you and your upcoming Catholic marriage!

Name _____

Date _____

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Throughout this book, you’ll see these icons, which denote types of topics and activities we’ll engage in today.



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Welcome and Introduction

Prayer

Good and loving God, we gather today in gratitude for all of the grace and help that you have given us that has allowed us to reach this point in preparing for Holy Matrimony.

As we journey from “I” to “we” and from “mine” to “ours”, we ask you for the continued grace and courage to love each other in our marriage as you have loved us.

We also ask that you journey with us Lord, so that we may learn how to be truly engaged in relationship with You and our beloved spouse. Help us to keep our wedding vows and to become reflections of your Divine Love to the world. Trusting in you, and with gratitude, we now pray:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Why I’m Getting Married in the Catholic Church

God has a plan for our marriage and for every marriage - a plan to protect us from harm, and have joy to the full. We know we already love each other, and yet we want our upcoming marriage to deepen and grow in joy and love. Catholic Christianity provides a fuller sense of love and commitment that can bring us to that joy. Consider the main reason(s) that you are getting married in the Catholic Church and then discuss these reasons with your fiancé(e). Please be very honest in your answers.

- _____ Because my parents want me to
- _____ Because I want my marriage to be recognized by the Church
- _____ Because I want my marriage to last and believe the Church has something to offer
- _____ Because I want the benefits of the grace of the Sacrament
- _____ Because I want God as part of my married life
- _____ Because this is just what you do when you are a Catholic
- _____ Because I believe marriage is a sacred and holy institution
- _____ Because it is a nice “traditional” thing to do
- _____ Because I want Christ to be part of my marriage commitment
- _____ Because my fiancé/fiancée is Catholic, and I want to please him/her
- _____ Because I like all the beauty and ambiance of a Catholic wedding service
- _____ Some other reason



An Invitation

Cardinal Timothy Dolan
Archbishop and Shepherd

"[Bishops] are constituted pastors in the Church, to be teachers of doctrine, the priests of sacred worship and the ministers of governance" (can. 375 §1; cf. Lumen Gentium, no. 20).

Jesus set forth for the apostles the model of the Good Shepherd, with whom He also identified Himself (cf. John 10). In the line of apostolic succession, we are the flock placed under the care of our Shepherd here in this Archdiocese, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who guides us in accord with God's law and the example of Christ. He invites you to join together in love with:

- Your beloved – learn and talk about each other's faith
- God – through prayer and the sacraments
- Community – by growing in good relationships and through good works

Growing into Your Vocation of Marriage

- **Taking the premarital inventory.** Throughout today's exercises, you will be able to reflect on the *Prepare/Enrich* or *Catholic Couple Checkup* premarital inventory that most of you either took before today, or plan to take following this day. These tools are designed to help couples discover their relationship strengths, and identify growth areas or issues that can threaten the vitality of their marital relationship. Learn more by visiting these websites:
 - prepare-enrich.com
 - catholiccouplecheckup.com
- **Online learning modules.** The "Beloved" and "Symbolon" series from the *Augustine Institute's* [Formed.org platform] are a part of your marriage preparation. "Beloved" explores the true meaning of Marriage and how to live it out together. "Symbolon" was filmed in locations such as Rome and the Holy Land and sets forth to systematically present the big picture of the Catholic Faith.
- **Post-Cana resources and opportunities.** The Pre-Cana Day is meant to be a springboard from which we can further engage couples in upcoming events and gatherings, and in further catechesis, including ongoing "text, chat or calls" with experts in the faith and marriage mentors within the archdiocesan faith community.

See page 46 for Post-Cana Connections and resources.



The Concept of Rules

My Rules, Your Rules, Our Rules

We all go into marriage with sets of rules about everything – from how we set the table, how to load the toilet paper on the roll and how to scramble an egg – to how to spend money, where to go on vacation, and how much time to spend with extended family. Many of these rules or expectations are based on ideas and feelings that come from our own childhood, and most of them are unconscious.

As everyone has assuredly told you by now, getting married involves a lot more than picking a church, and happily ever after includes a lot more than the honeymoon. Having a grasp of the rules you are going into marriage with will equip you with the knowledge you need to communicate clearly with each other. This knowledge of individual rules and needs will help you build together a new “rule book,” one that defines your new family.

Two Steps

1. Understanding your own rules
2. Creating a shared book of rules

Understanding My Own Rules

The first step is to understand your own rules – without judgment or criticism.

- This is simply the process of articulating what your expectations are.
- Your job is not to judge these rules or decide if you should have them or not, it is simply to understand what you are bringing with you into marriage.

Creating a Shared Book of Rules

The second step, which may begin today but will certainly be a work in progress for years to come, will be to decide how to integrate your two sets of rules to come up with a unified plan of how to handle life as a married couple together.

- This guidebook will help you get started to understand yourself and your rules. At various times during the day, you will be prompted to reflect on certain areas of your life and the expectations or rules that you are bringing to your marriage.
- In the Exercise and Discussion sections (marked by the  and  icons) you are encouraged to journal freely in the area being discussed. You will always be able to come back to these reflections to discuss together how your two sets of rules fit together. Sometimes one of you will decide you can give up or modify your expectations, and sometimes you may decide to integrate them together to build a totally new expectation.

Gift of Self

Striving for a Happy Marriage

What kind of marriage do you want to have? No doubt you want to strive to have a happy marriage, but how do you want to be known by your friends and family as a married couple?



Exercise - What is Our Marriage Going to Be?

You need to start off understanding your own strengths; then you can decide together how to use both of your strengths to build a new team.

What strengths do you bring to your relationship?



What strengths does your partner bring to the relationship?



What strengths does your partner bring to the relationship that might make up for your own weaknesses?



Think of a married couple you really admire. What strengths do they have as a couple?



What do you want your marriage to be known for?



Now trade books and read each other's reflections. Discuss what you read.



Marriage as a Vocation and a Sacrament

“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gen 2:24)

Marriage as Our Vocation

Marriage can be seen as God’s love story for your life, and living within God’s plan is the best guarantee to a happy marriage.

Marriage is intended to be a lifelong, life-giving, loving union between a husband and a wife. Saying “I do” is your decision to make yourself a gift, which means to choose to put yourself in the hands of your spouse until death parts you.

The Questions of Consent and Your Marriage Vows

The questions before the Exchange of Consent are a solemn moment when the bride and groom individually pledge their intention to undertake the vocation of a faithful and life-long marriage open to the gift of new life.

The Exchange of Consent – the marriage vows – is at the heart of the Catholic wedding ceremony. “I take you to be my spouse. I promise to be faithful to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and honor you all the days of my life” – or – “I take you for my lawful spouse, 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 until death do us part.” Here, the couple promises in the presence of God and the Church to love each other faithfully for the rest of their lives. The vows shape the couple and the meaning of their life together and form an unbreakable covenant between them. That’s why we can’t write our own vows.

Readings for Your Catholic Wedding Liturgy

The readings at a Catholic wedding liturgy are a proclamation of God’s Word and of the Church’s faith about marriage. For this reason, they are limited to readings from the scriptures (the Bible). There are nine options for the first reading from the Old Testament, thirteen options for the second reading from the New Testament and ten choices for the Gospel. You choose one from each of these categories. The readings for your Wedding Liturgy can be found at:

foryourmarriage.org/readings

Marriage as a Sacrament

Marriage has existed since the creation of humankind, and it is the core cell or unit of society. We read in Scripture that God joined the first man and woman in marriage (Gen 2:18-25) and blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” (Gen 1:28). From these passages from Genesis and from the teachings of Christ and his Church, we learn that marriage is a lifelong partnership of life and love.

Jesus made marriage a sacrament and a symbol of his love for the Church. Just as when he blessed the couple at the Wedding at Cana, likewise in a sacramental marriage Christ blesses Christians couples with his grace to sustain them in their marriage.

For a marriage to be a sacrament, both the husband and wife must be baptized as Christians, and they must intend to live their marriage according to God’s plan.

Reference: See Marriage as a Vocation and a Sacrament – pages 29 – 33.

Dreams for Your Marriage

Where do you want your marriage to go?

Do you remember dreams you had as a little girl or boy? Did you dream about being an astronaut, a firefighter, or a ballerina? Did you dream about going on adventures on the open ocean or deep in the jungle? Where did you dream about going? What did you dream about doing?

Exercise and Discussion - Who Do You [as a Married Couple] Want to Be?



Exercise

We can get so caught up in the mad rush to accomplish things that we forget to dream. Getting married means starting something new, and that means a chance to create new dreams.

Each of you has a unique way of thinking about life and where you want to go in it. Marriage doesn't mean you lose your dreams, it means you have someone to share them with.

First, though, you need to know what your dreams are, then have the chance to share them with each other. Do you know what your future spouse's 10-year dream looks like? Do you know what your own looks like?

Take a few minutes and write about where you want to be in five years. What does your life look like? Where do you live? What kind of communities are you a part of? Where have you traveled? What have you accomplished in that time? How many kids do you have?



Now think about your life 10 years from now. How old will you be and what will your life look like then? What will you have accomplished? What will have changed?



Now trade books and read each other's reflections. Discuss what you read.



Discussion

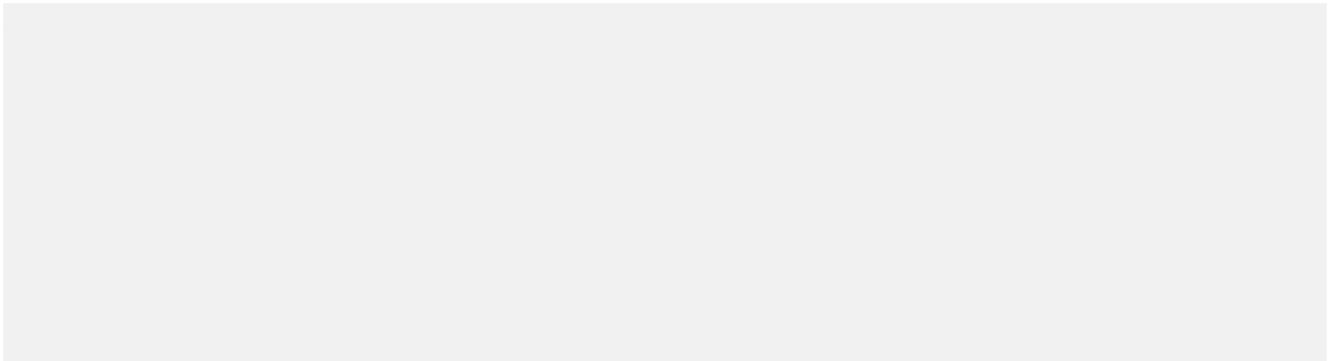
Communication and Common Challenges

Exercise – What Kind of Communication Style Did I Grow Up With?

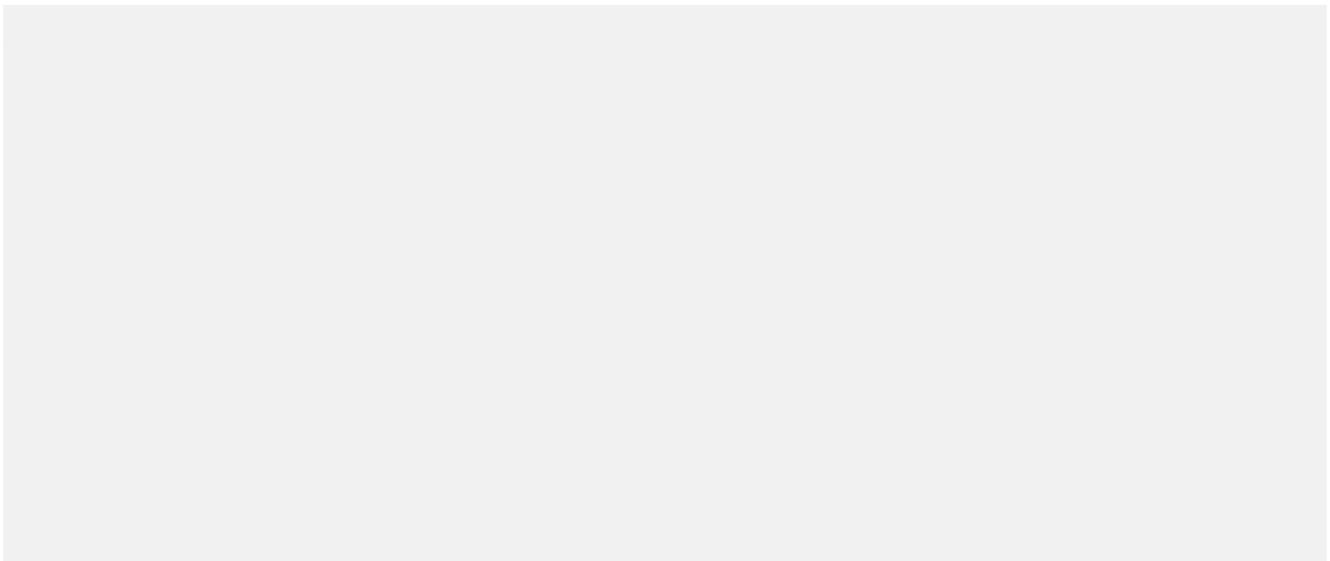


Rules on expressing emotion. How did your parents (mom and/or dad) or guardians express their feelings when you were growing up? Did they express positive and negative emotions equally? What habits of expression did you pick up from them?

Write about what you may have learned about expressing emotion.

Rules on resolving conflict. How did your family of origin work through their conflicts? Did they fight out loud? Was someone quiet? Passive-aggressive? Did they hold grudges or let things go? Did one person typically get his or her way? How did they respond to conflicts with you? What might you have learned about conflict resolution from their example?

Now trade books and read each other's reflections. Discuss what you read.



Healthy Communication

Laws of Healthy Communication. Communication is a way of loving the other person by putting his or her perspective first in your mind. You will have a chance to have your perspective heard, but love means you are willing to give the other person a chance as well.

1. Rules of Expression

- "I" statements: "I feel" needs to begin the sentence.
- Stay specific: Don't generalize on time, events, personality characteristics, etc.
- Make unarguable statements. "I felt hurt by the way you spoke to me" is an unarguable statement. "You always talk to me like a jerk" can be argued. This second statement doesn't focus on the feeling, it calls the other person a name, and it generalizes to every act of communication.

2. Rules of Empathy/Listening

- Regardless of your perspective, you put it on hold, "put it on the shelf" and wait until it's your turn to express in order to take it off the shelf.
- Forget for the moment that you are you and have your own opinion.
- Try to imagine what it feels like to be the other person. What is going on in her/his world? How does it feel to be him/her?
- Imagine this person is a friend you are detached from, but care enough to listen to.
- Then put into words the inner experience you are attempting to share. Start the sentence with "It sounds like you felt..."

Exercise – Forming a New Married Identity on Social Media *(verbal exercise)*

Practicing the communication laws above, **share your thoughts** about establishing a new married identity on social media. Be sure to share what boundaries and rules should be considered or established regarding how you use all forms of Social Media and digital communications.



While the other person is sharing thoughts and ideas, **practice empathy** by putting yourself in the other's shoes and forgetting your own preconceived ideas.

Exercise – Dealing with Difficult Situations in Our Relationship

Reflect on your last disagreement, and write the reason for the conflict/disagreement below. Then, in the list of behaviors below, check the boxes which reflect what your behavior was like during this past disagreement.

Reason for conflict/disagreement:



My behavior(s):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shutting down/the silent treatment | <input type="checkbox"/> Yelling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming the other | <input type="checkbox"/> Using sarcasm or ridicule |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring the issue | <input type="checkbox"/> Crying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeking solace/comfort from others | <input type="checkbox"/> Lashing out in anger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using offensive language | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> |



My commitment to you in resolving our next disagreement is to:



Understanding Our “Love Languages”

In the popular book *The Five Love Languages*, Dr. Gary Chapman identifies five distinct ways in which we tend to give & receive love. Dr. Chapman says that although the five are interrelated, they are distinct enough from one another that it is as if they are different “languages”.

- 1. Words of Affirmation.** I feel most loved when someone tells me how much they appreciate me and the particular things I do
- 2. Quality time.** I feel most loved when someone gives me their undivided attention
- 3. Gifts.** I feel most loved when someone gives me a gift, a physically tangible expression that says, “I was thinking of you”
- 4. Acts of Service.** I feel most loved when someone chooses to do something for me, something that they know that I would like them to do
- 5. Physical Touch.** I feel most loved by someone’s physical expressions of affection

Write a brief response to each of the following questions, and share your responses with your fiancé/fiancée.



1. If someone were to express their love for me, which of the five “love languages” would mean the most to me?



2. What do I believe is the primary “love language” of my fiancé / fiancée?



Imagine if you woke up to discover that your spouse literally spoke another language than you. What would you do? How would you convey your love (most effectively) to him/her?

Review your answers about “love languages” with your fiancé/fiancée.



Blessings and Graces

The two sacraments of service, Holy Orders and Matrimony, build up the life of the Church. Holy Orders is the means for the spiritual life of the Church, and Matrimony is a witness of Christ's love that builds up the Church through the procreation and education of children.

A Catholic priest has been invited to join us today to bless all of the engaged couples and to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) for those Catholics desiring this sacrament.

The Order of Blessing an Engaged Couple

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Start with the Sign of the Cross, and then the priest/deacon begins:

The Lord be with you.

All reply:

And with your spirit.

We know that God's grace is a constant need for everyone, at all times.

Yet no one can doubt that members of Christ's faithful have special need of that grace when they are preparing to form a new family.

And so, let us ask God's blessing upon our brothers and sisters here today preparing for marriage, that they may grow in mutual respect, love each other more deeply, and approach the celebration of holy Matrimony chastely through appropriate companionship and prayer together.

READING OF THE WORD OF GOD (John 15:9-12)

Listen, brothers and sisters, to the words of the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. "I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Response: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYERS

With confidence, let us call on God the Father, who so loved all people that he made them his children in Christ and revealed them to the world as witnesses of his love.

Please respond:

R). Keep us in your love for ever, Lord.

You place upon men and women the gentle demands of your love, so that they may find happiness in accepting them. We pray to the Lord:

R). Keep us in your love for ever, Lord.

You bring a man and woman together in mutual delight, that the family thus formed may joyfully be crowned with children. We pray to the Lord:

R). Keep us in your love for ever, Lord.

You call the engaged couples gathered here to a full communion of love, so that they may become one in mind and heart as members of the Christian family. We pray to the Lord:

R). Keep us in your love for ever, Lord.

Give peace, tranquility and joy to these couples as they prepare for their upcoming wedding day. We pray to the Lord:

R). Keep us in your love for ever, Lord.

The couples will face each other; the man takes the woman's left hand and holds it with his right hand as the engagement ring he gave her is blessed. The engagement rings are blessed with the following formula: Safeguard + the gifts you have exchanged, so that you may fulfill in due time the pledge you have offered each other.

R). Amen.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

The priest/deacon prays:

We give you praise, O Lord, who in your gentle wisdom call and prepare your sons and daughters to love each other.

Graciously strengthen + their hearts, we pray, so that, by keeping faith and pleasing you in all things, they may come happily to holy Matrimony. Through Christ our Lord.

R). Amen.

CONCLUSION OF THE RITE

May the God of love and peace dwell within you, direct your steps, and strengthen your hearts in his love.

All: Amen.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

When we go to confession, we are really confessing our sins to Jesus Christ, represented by the priest. We thank God for this great gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) in which we encounter Christ and receive his forgiveness. This sacrament helps us to become the women and men God created us to be.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

(From "A Guide to Confession," www.ncregister.com/info/confession_guide_for_adults)

How to Go to Confession

1. You always have the option to go to confession anonymously, that is, behind a screen, or face to face, if you so desire.
2. After the priest greets you in the name of Christ, make the sign of the cross. He may choose to recite a reading from Scripture, after which you say: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession. These are my sins."
3. Tell your sins simply and honestly to the priest. You might even want to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of your sins and ask the priest for advice or direction.
4. Listen to the advice the priest gives you and accept the penance from him. Then make an Act of Contrition for your sins.

Oh my God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In His name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

5. The priest will then dismiss you with the words of praise: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. You respond: "For His mercy endures forever." The priest will then conclude with: "The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." And you respond by saying: "Thanks be to God."
6. Spend some time with Our Lord thanking and praising Him for the gift of His mercy. Try to perform your penance as soon as possible.

PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

O most merciful God! Prostrate at your feet, I implore your forgiveness. I sincerely desire to leave all my evil ways and to confess my sins with all sincerity to you and to your priest. I am a sinner, have mercy on me, O Lord. Give me a lively faith and a firm hope in the Passion of my Redeemer. Give me, for your mercy's sake a sorrow for having offended so good a God. Mary, my mother, refuge of sinners, pray for me that I may make a good confession. Amen.

AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE (Based on the Ten Commandments)

I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.

Do I pray each day? Do I in any way allow anyone or anything to become more important to me than God, for example: my job, material possessions, recreation, pornography?

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Have my words, actively or passively, disrespected God, the Church, or people? Do I use God's name in fowl language?

Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

Do I worship at Mass every Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) and on Holy Days of Obligation (Jan. 1; the Ascension; Aug. 15; Nov. 1; Dec. 8; Dec. 25)? Do I set aside work, when possible on Sunday, and allow for relaxation of mind and body? Do I look for ways to spend time with family and friends on Sunday?

Honor your father and your mother.

Do I show my parents due respect? Do I strive to develop and maintain good communication with my parents where possible? Beyond parents, do I mistreat, disrespect, or criticize my siblings, relatives, and friends? Am I a source of family unity, or division?

You shall not kill.

Have I harmed anyone physically, verbally, or emotionally, including through gossip or

manipulation of any kind? Have I engaged in any way, including suggesting, an abortion? Have I damaged my own life by abuse of alcohol or drugs?

You shall not commit adultery.

Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself? Have I obeyed God's design that sexual love is reserved for a man and woman in marriage?

You shall not steal.

Have I taken resources that belonged to another? Have I wasted time at home, work or school?

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I lied, gossiped, insulted others, or embellished stories at the expense of another? Do I bear ill will towards others?

You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse.

Have I honored my spouse or fiancé(e) with my full affection and exclusive love appropriate to the relationship? Do I look with lust and engage in inappropriate behavior, even in my mind, at others?

You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Am I content with my own means and needs, or am I jealous of what others have that I do not have? Do I wish ill will towards others who have more than I do?

Working Together as Husband and Wife



Exercise - Time, Money, and Extended Family

An important element in marriage is the fundamental shift in the mindset from an individual approach to a partner approach. As you adjust your thinking more and more to the partner approach, we hope the questions below will help you to embrace compromise and collaboration as key values in your marriage.

Time is a precious commodity. How did your parents/guardians manage time, priorities and schedules when you were growing up (school, sports, events, family, holidays, etc.)? Reflect and write about how you and your spouse might handle conflicting priorities and divide your time between families, friends, events, etc.? Will you set any ground rules for your time as a couple? As individuals?



How was money discussed in your family as you were growing up? Was money tight, or not even a thought? Were there arguments about money? Reflect and write about how you think you and your future spouse will decide on money issues.



Look at the section "Facing and Planning Our Finances Together" on page 36 in the Reference Section and choose (circle) 3 to 5 items that you will discuss with your fiancé(e) when you exchange your books. List the numbered items below to aid your discussion time.







Exercise - Trusting and Sharing: What is Okay to Hold Back?

Did you grow up in an environment (home, school, friends) where you were able to be honest when sharing and/or expressing your thoughts, feelings and actions? What experiences come to mind as you think about this?



How would you rate your ability to listen to your fiancé(e) with total openness, love and understanding? Reflect on how you can grow in accepting his or her true self without trying to change him or her.



What might keep you from sharing yourself totally with your future spouse? (Fear? Past hurts? Unresolved conflicts? Safeguarding your own vulnerability?) Reflect on how you would like to improve and grow in sharing your total and authentic self with your future spouse.



Marital love entails a decision to give oneself completely to one's spouse. How confident are you in your ability to share your whole life – the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of your life – with your partner in married life? Please explain.



Now trade books and read each other's reflections. Discuss what you read.



Married Love and Intimacy

Marriage Images the Trinity

Marriage images the love of the Trinity. In understanding this truth, the following key points covered in today's session are for your review and reflection:

- Males and females are complementary and have equal human dignity
- Free, total, faithful, and fruitful: characteristics of divine love; sex that has this kind of love mirrors the love of God and leads to the greatest happiness
- Free, total, and faithful sex is always fruitful
- Sex and Natural Family Planning (NFP): Sex that is missing freedom, totality, or fidelity is not fruitful. This is why the Catholic Church objects to contraception (artificial birth control). NFP, which we will discuss in greater depth next, enables couples to use science to understand their fertility, and determine when they should engage in or refrain from having sex, depending on their desire to start or expand a family.
- **Reference Section p. 29:** Marriage as a Vocation and a Sacrament
- **Reference Section p. 34:** The Truth and Beauty of our Sexuality and NFP/FABMs
- **Reference Section p. 40:** Pornography: Facts and Dangers
- **Reference Section p. 46:** Post-Cana Connections (*Theology of the Body Resources*)



We've just heard about the beauty and joy of God's plan for sex and sexuality, and you may be feeling a little uncomfortable, or you may be filled with joy and excitement hearing about this presentation on human love and intimacy. Whatever you are feeling, please try to open your heart to God's grace - to embrace this gift of sexual love and together, **reflect on the questions below.**

For Premarital Couples

- Based on this presentation of sexual love and intimacy, would you as a couple consider "saving" sex (if you haven't already) from this point forward, so that on your wedding day, sex is something very special - the completion of your wedding vows? Why or why not?
- Together, begin reflecting on where your thinking, attitudes and actions are regarding physical (sexual) intimacy and emotional intimacy as you approach your upcoming marriage. How does, or can, your intimacy bring you closer in your relationship with God?

For Married Couples

- What are some of the joys and strengths of the physical and emotional intimacy aspects within your marriage?
- What prior sexual wounds or confusion did you bring into your marriage?
- How could you each contribute to making your emotional and spiritual relationship more meaningful and loving?

Please take advantage of any extra time to review the Reference Sections noted on the top of this page and if time allows, discuss what you read.



Natural Family Planning (NFP) and the Gift of Fertility

NFP and Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABMs)

NFP is an umbrella term for the methods of awareness of a woman's fertility cycle. The Catholic Church supports the methods of NFP because they respect God's design for married love. **Fertility Awareness**, and **Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABMs)** – are the contemporary terms and methods for practicing NFP.

Both NFP and FABMs empower sexuality to be something in which nothing is held back from each other in the most intimate part of a married couple's lives. Any other way of engaging with each other sexually is like saying, "I want some of you but not all," or "I want to give you some of myself but not all."

NFP is the general term for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or avoid pregnancy. It highlights that couples do not use artificial barriers (e.g., condoms) or chemicals (e.g., the birth control pill) to prevent pregnancy, and it intends that both spouses share responsibility for the decision of achieving or avoiding pregnancy. The couples accept fertility as a normal state of health and share responsibility for family planning by modifying behaviors according to their intentions.

In the strictest sense of the term, the FABM encompasses merely the scientific/biological aspect (that these methods are based on an understanding of one's fertility). As such, the FABM can be used as a natural family planning method, but it can also be used for monitoring a woman's reproductive health.

The difference is that an FABM doesn't require both spouses to share responsibility for the decision of achieving or avoiding pregnancy (but many couples choose to share this responsibility.)

If you want to avoid pregnancy, you should abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. If you want to become pregnant, the best possible chance for this would be to engage in sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle.

See Reference: The Truth and Beauty of our Sexuality and NFP/FABMs - pages 34 - 35.



The Deeper Understanding Behind NFP

Sex is the physical manifestation of your marriage vows. First you say "I do" with your words, then you put your vow into action with your body. Therefore, sex is made to communicate the same vows you say with your words. When you promise to give yourselves to each other fully, holding nothing back, you are putting that into action as well. Sex that holds something back is like promising to only make a partial gift of yourself in your wedding.

Practical Reasons to Learn Fertility Awareness and Consider NFP/FABMs

1. It's healthy: It's safe, and there are no side-effects
2. It can be over 99% effective in avoiding pregnancy – depending on method and study (see p. 35)
3. It provides self-knowledge about the woman's body and fertility cycle
4. Many fertility apps and monitoring devices are emerging and are being continually improved
5. Support can be found through Catholic Social Media and Facebook groups

Common Challenges

1. Periods of Abstinence
2. Commitment, self-mastery, and consistency
3. General Lack of proper understanding by society and the culture
4. Lack of support by those who misunderstand or reject NFP or FABMs

Exercise - Embracing Fertility and Children as a Gift



Exercise

In the “Dreams” exercise you did earlier, you wrote about your life in 5 and 10 years. Now you are going to consider more thoughtfully your expectations about your fertility and children.

Are you using, or do you plan to use, natural family planning (or a Fertility Awareness Based Method – FABM) as a way to achieve or postpone a pregnancy? Why or why not? Have you researched and considered some of the methods, apps, or sensors available? Why or why not?



What expectations do you have about family size and children? How did/does your experience affect your desires for how many children you want to have?



What would you do if you had an unexpected pregnancy before you planned to have children?



What would you do if you learned you were unable to have children? (Adoption? Church-approved fertility treatment?)



As a parent, how do you want to use your childhood experiences to parent (or not) your own children?



Now trade books and read each other’s reflections. Discuss what you read.



Discussion

Spirituality

What is Your Spiritual Life?

The spiritual life is a daily process of dying to self and recommitting ourselves to God – living our journey to God. You can think of it as being composed for four aspects:

- Our prayer life
- Our sacramental life
- Learning about God and our faith
- Living the moral life and doing good works

A very traditional definition of prayer is “raising our hearts and minds to God.” Prayer is not just talking at God, but with God. We also listen to God – we hear his voice in the silence of our hearts. This brings peace, joy, and a sense of rightness to us.

The initiative to pray comes from God who moves a person to the act of praying: It is grace that disposes us to pray, and grace that energizes our praying.

You may have heard this before: The family that prays together, stays together. Statistics bear this out (see Reference section for Institute for Family Studies Blog, p. 37-38).



The sacraments are also ways for us to deepen our relationship with Christ and to participate in the mysteries of God. Jesus gave us the sacraments as ways to receive the grace of God.

Through the sacraments we obtain sanctifying grace and sacramental grace. Through sacramental grace, spouses are strengthened to live out their marriage.

The traditional definition of a sacrament is: a visible sign of an invisible reality, instituted by Christ to give us grace (and make us holy). If you reflect a bit about this definition, you can see how each of the seven sacraments fits this definition, including marriage.

It is important to learn about God and your faith. If you are both Catholic, then you should explore Catholic resources such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church which can be found online.

Prayer Apps *(generally available in iTunes, Google Play, etc.)*

[Click to Pray](#) is an app that accompanies you throughout your day. It connects you with thousands of people who find purpose in praying every day for the challenges of humanity and for the mission of the Church.

[Hallow](#), is an app app that combines modern elements of habit- building apps with the peace and tranquility of prayer. With access to 500+ prayer sessions, music, and meditation guides, Hallow helps you incorporate daily prayer seamlessly into your life by setting goals, journaling, tracking streaks, and setting reminders.

[Reimagining the Examen](#) is an interactive app that leads you through a series of Examens, encouraging you to sit in prayer with God each day. You select an examen (relationships, habits, fears, etc.) and select your own background music.

[Laudate](#), from CatholicApps.com, includes many resources such as an interactive Rosary, Daily Readings, the Liturgy of the Hours, and two versions of the bible – all in a simple to navigate layout. This has a huge selection of prayers.

(continued on next page)

[Catholic Mega App](#) is a one-stop resource for all things Catholic. It has the daily liturgy of the hours, daily mass readings, common prayers, and Order of the Mass. This app also features a digital bead counting Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet.

[iPieta](#) has a ton of Catholic content including literature from the Church Fathers, Council's, Pope's, Saints' biographies, etc. It also has an audio option to listen to the content.

**These are some of the apps that were available at the time this booklet was developed and printed. If you are interested and used to using apps, you realize that new apps become available on an ongoing basis.*

Interfaith Marriages: Issues to Consider

If you and your fiancé/fiancée are not both Catholic, then here are some issues to consider:

- Interfaith marriages (marriages between members of different faith traditions or religious communities) are common among Catholics and are growing. While a great number of these relationships are strong and healthy, inter-religious marriages face some challenges that same-faith marriages don't.
- Disagreements over matters of religious faith can be a major cause of problems in interfaith marriages. They may also cause significant conflict and difficulty with in-laws. Before getting married, an interfaith couple should discuss ways to develop shared practices of prayer and devotion while still being members of different religious communities. Sensitive, open communication and genuine respect are vitally important.
- The question of how to raise the children is an extremely important issue in interfaith marriages. A couple is strongly urged to arrive at a mutually agreeable decision about the religious upbringing of their children before the marriage.
- Studies show that interfaith couples are much more likely to drift away from their faith after marriage. Couples should resist this tendency by supporting each other in their beliefs and practices. A spouse should never interfere with their partner's faith or pressure them to give it up.
- Many people find that their religious interests and commitment increase in the first few years of marriage, and after they have children. If this happens, don't let it become a source of suspicion or competition – a force that will separate you from each other. Rather, use it as an opportunity to grow together.
- Interfaith marriages are often most successful when one spouse converts to the other's religion. Most conversions take place at the time of the marriage or while the first child is still young. But there should never be undue pressure to convert. An interfaith marriage may be the occasion for conversion, but conversion should not be a condition of marriage.

For additional questions to discuss, see page 39 in the Reference section on Interfaith Marriage.



Finally, we should always look to live a moral life and do good works. Prayer and the sacramental life actually give you the graces to help your neighbor and do good works, with a sense of joy and peace.

Exercise - Faith, Religion, and Spirituality



How did your family celebrate religious holidays when you were growing up? What aspects of these celebrations do you want to keep, and which ones do you want to modify or get rid of?



How did your father express his relationship with God if he had one? How did your mother? What did you learn about a relationship with God from your parents?



Did you ever know your mother or father to pray? Did your parents/family pray together? How did this affect you, and do you want something different or the same for your family?



Did any other experiences (schools, camps, friends, friends' families, etc.) have an influence and/or lasting impact on you (relative to religious practices)?



Do you think a married couple should pray together? If so, how much?



Now trade books and read each other's reflections. Discuss what you read.



The Examen Prayer

St. Ignatius developed a practical way to pray and grow closer to God. You can use this together, and grow closer to each other while you grow closer to God. He's not as far away as you might think.

It is based on the premise that God speaks to us in our own hearts. We must develop an inner awareness of the movements within us. This takes time to develop but you are already capable of it.

Five Steps of the Examen Prayer

1. Become aware of God's presence.

- Just sit quietly, holding your beloved's hand, becoming calm in the Spirit. Pray aloud, "Ever present God, here with us now, help us to be here with you."

2. Review the day in thanksgiving.

- Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God.
- Each of you takes a turn to express out loud to God what you are grateful to Him for. Walk through your day and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts.

3. Review the emotions you have felt throughout the day.

- Can you detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of your emotions? Reflect on the feelings you experienced today - positive and negative, painful and pleasing.
- Simply pay attention to any and all feelings as they surface: delight, boredom, fear, anticipation, resentment, anger, peace, impatience, etc.
- Spend a few minutes quietly processing your day to yourself, and then give some of the highlights to your partner out loud.

4. Choose one emotion that stands out to you from today.

- Was this a positive or negative emotion? Did that feeling give you hope or feel like a burden?
- God speaks to us through the authentic emotions we experience throughout the day. What might God be saying to you through that experience?

5. Look toward tomorrow.

- Tomorrow is a new day. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges.
- Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you think about tomorrow. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Full of anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer and ask God for help and understanding.
- (Optional) Say an "Our Father" to conclude your prayer.

For additional information on the Examen prayer, visit:

www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray

Wrap-Up and Sending Forth

References

Marriage as a Vocation and a Sacrament (pages 29-33)

The Truth and Beauty of Our Sexuality and NFP/FABMs (pages 34-35)

Facing and Planning Our Finances Together (page 36)

Does the Family that Prays Together Really Stay Together? (pages 37-38)

Interfaith Marriages: Questions to Discuss (page 39)

Pornography: Facts and Dangers (pages 40-42)

Hope and Healing After Abortion (page 43)

About Our Special Contributors (pages 44-45)

Post-Cana Connections and online resources (page 46)

References

Marriage as a Vocation and a Sacrament

GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

a. The marital relationship is meant to image the love of the Trinity.

"By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 221)

"The deepest desire of the human heart is to see another, and be seen by that other."
(*St. Augustine*)

"Creating the human race in His own image... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation... of love and communion." (*Familiaris Consortio* 11)

b. God's love can be characterized as free, total, faithful, and fruitful.

c. True love is a gift of self.

"To love is to give everything and to give oneself." (*St. Therese of Lisieux*)

"In all truth, only the love that unites the free gift of self (*agape*) with the impassioned desire for reciprocity (*eros*) instills a joy, which eases the heaviest of burdens." (*Pope Benedict XVI*)

THE QUESTIONS OF CONSENT

a. Acceptance of "The Questions before the Consent" is the foundation of a Catholic marriage.

b. The Catechism offers a definition of marriage: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (CCC 1601; cf. Can. 1055 / *Gaudium et Spes* 48)

c. Three questions of consent spell out exactly what the marriage commitment means:

1. Have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?
2. Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?
3. Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God, and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it." (*Redemptor Hominis* 10)

"God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God, who is himself love.

Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unending love with which God loves man." (CCC 1604)

"God is love." (1 John 4:16)

What Do We Mean by "Free and Total Love"?

"Have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?"

LOVING FREELY: WITHOUT COERCION

a. "Loving freely" is when I will your good for your sake, without demanding anything else in return.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18)

"Love wills the good of the other." (St. Thomas Aquinas)

b. The reality of sin. "Lust is not always plain and obvious; sometimes it is concealed, so that it passes itself off as love." (Pope John Paul II)

LOVING WHOLEHEARTEDLY: THE GIVING OF THE WHOLE GIFT OF SELF

"When the hour had come for him to fulfill the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up ("Abba . . . not my will, but yours."), but even in his last words on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one: 'Father, forgive them...'" (CCC 2605)

"Willingness to give ourselves out of love, even if it entails suffering, is what makes us fruitful." (Scott Hahn, American theologian)

TO GIVE YOURSELVES TO EACH OTHER IN MARRIAGE

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

Free and Total Love

The characteristic features and exigencies of married love are clearly indicated, and it is of the highest importance to evaluate them exactly.

"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. 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." (*Humanae Vitae* 9)

What Do We Mean by “Faithful Love”?

**“Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage,
to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?”**

FAITHFUL LOVE

a. Show mercy to your spouse, and ask for mercy. “Let us love not in word or speech, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

b. Forgive your spouse, and ask for forgiveness. “Love also bears fruit in mercy and forgiveness. We see this in a particular way in the scene of the woman caught in adultery; in front of the Temple, the woman is surrounded by her accusers, but later, alone with Jesus, she meets not condemnation but the admonition to lead a more worthy life (cf. Jn 8:1-11).” (*Amoris Laetitia* 27)

c. Make your spouse a priority.

“Only the value of the person can sustain a stable relationship. Only then is their living together something more than the joining of two selfish individuals, and capable of achieving a real personal unity. When love develops and reaches the person, then it is forever.”
(Rocco Buttiglioni, Italian philosopher)

“By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice’. The ‘intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them.’ ” (CCC 1646)

“Some Advice from a Mother to Her Married Son”, by Judith Viorst
The answer to, do you love me isn’t, I married you, didn’t I?
Or, Can’t we discuss this after the ballgame is through?
It isn’t, Well that all depends on what you mean by ‘love’.
Or even, Come to bed and I’ll prove that I do.
The answer isn’t, How can I talk about love when
the bacon is burned and the house is an absolute mess and
the children are screaming their heads off and I’m going to miss my bus?
The answer is yes.
The answer is yes.
The answer is yes.

WE’RE CALLED TO PLACE GOD AT THE CENTER OF OUR MARRIAGE

“I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

“By virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every couple marries Christ.” (Paul Evdokimov, Russian Orthodox theologian)

“Christianity is not an ideology, but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

“It is possible to offer fervent prayer even while walking in public or strolling alone, or seated in your shop... while buying or selling... or even while cooking.” (St. John Chrysostom)

Faithful Love

“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. 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.” (*Humanae Vitae* 9)

What Do We Mean by “Fruitful Love”?

**“Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God,
and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?”**

SEXUALITY IS GOOD

“Men receive love by giving love; women give love by receiving love.” (Angelo Cardinal Scola, Patriarch of Venice)

“The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible the invisible: the spiritual and the divine.” (Pope John Paul II)

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY

Sexual intercourse also speaks a language, and it is the language of the wedding vows: of free, total, faithful, and fruitful love.

“The very words ‘I take you to be my wife / my husband’ can be fulfilled only by means of conjugal intercourse. Here we pass to the reality which corresponds to the words.” (John Paul II)

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING (NFP) AND FERTILITY AWARENESS

“Love is indeed ‘ecstasy’, not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an on-going exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: ‘Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it’ (Luke 17:33).” (*Deus Caritas Est* 6)

WELCOMING A NEW LIFE

“The family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God. Each new life ‘allows us to appreciate the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us. It is the beauty of being loved first: children are loved even before they arrive’ (Catechesis, Feb 11, 2015).” (*Amoris Laetitia* 166)

FOCUSING ON THE SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIP EVEN WHILE PARENTING

“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’ (Gen. 2:18) and ‘Who made man from the beginning male and female’ (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: ‘Increase and multiply’ (Gen. 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 Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day." (*Gaudium et Spes* 50)

MARRIAGE AS A SACRAMENT

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of the grace of the sacrament of Matrimony:

"By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God." This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."

Christ is the source of this grace. "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony." 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:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit. (CCC 1641-1642)

WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

- a. The Catechism offers this definition of the sacraments:** "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions." (CCC 1131)
- b. Three criteria for a sacrament:** There must be an outward (that is, visible) sign; the sign must have been instituted or given by Christ; and it must give grace.
- c. Form (the words of the rite) and matter (the physical stuff of the sacrament)**
- d. In the Sacrament of Marriage, you are the ministers to one another!** "The Church holds that the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that 'makes the marriage'. If consent is lacking, there is no marriage." (CCC 1626)

Consider what's been covered today. These topics and exercises should help to give us a blueprint of

- What a true gift of self looks like in marriage
- How to live the love that God, who is love, invites us into (freely, totally, faithfully, fruitfully)
- The gift of life
- Practical things you can do to live out the questions of consent every day of your marriage.

The Truth and Beauty of our Sexuality and NFP/FABMs

One of the great gifts of our Catholic faith is our positive and beautiful view of sexuality. We don't buy into the world's view of sexuality, which focuses almost entirely on the physical and leaves people feeling empty and used – and aware deep in their hearts that something is missing. Our Catholic understanding of sex looks at the entire person, and at God's plan for our lives and our love. To help you understand the truth and beauty of our sexuality, here's a quick overview:

It is Not Good to Be Alone

We can't live without love. Our lives are senseless and lonely if we don't experience love, if we don't participate intimately in it. Every human person has been given a vocation to love by God. We are all drawn to relationships where we can experience genuine love—first of all friendships and romantic relationships, but ultimately in the vocation of marriage. We know this from our own hearts, which long for love.

The Language of Our Bodies

To break out of our loneliness, we have to listen to the language of our bodies, and to the meaning God has put there. Remember, we're persons, not just bodies, made in the image and likeness of God. However, our bodies can tell us about more than the physical – they can tell us about our spiritual side as well, and about the nature God built into us. When we look at our bodies, they clearly tell us that men and women are made for each other, and are made to join together in the sexual act that unifies us and brings new life into the world. This link between love and life is a necessary part of our sexuality, and of marriage – it's the truth about who we are and what our love is meant to be. Essentially, our bodies tell us that we are made for the life-long covenant of marriage, and for bringing new life into the world. This is called the "nuptial meaning of the body," and it's the starting point to living the truth and beauty of our sexuality.

One Flesh

Think back to the passage from Genesis about the marriage of the first man and woman: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh". Can you imagine a more powerful image of unity and intimacy than becoming one flesh with your spouse? This is the way we experience true love – by giving ourselves fully to our spouse, with no conditions or strings attached, nothing between us and nothing held back. When a husband and wife make love in this sense, it is the ultimate expression of their "one flesh" unity, and we're able to be "naked without shame" with one another – fully open and intimate, trusting each other and open to our spouse's gift of love. This is God's plan – for us to become "one flesh" in the lifelong, life-giving communion of persons. This is what our sexuality was made for.

Use and Misuse

All too often, unfortunately, we don't live according to God's plan for our sexuality. We misuse this gift by using others for our own pleasure, or by deliberately sterilizing our sexual acts. We become self-seeking and manipulative, and act out of lust instead of love. Whenever we do these things, we're no longer giving ourselves fully in life-giving love, we're not building true intimacy and unity with our spouse, and we're not speaking the truth about our sexuality. That's surely not where God wants us to be, and we suffer the consequences – loneliness, frustration, and feeling used and empty.

Redeemed Sex

Fortunately, there's hope – we're not stuck in this trap of use and misuse. Jesus Himself, who became truly human, has redeemed us and our sexuality. How did He do it? First of all, by speaking the truth about marriage, sex and love, and showing us God's plan for marriage. Most importantly, when He gave Himself fully and completely to His spouse – to us – on the cross, He freed us from our selfishness and gave us new life. Thanks to Jesus, and with His help, we can become truly "one flesh" with our spouse by embracing God's plan for our sexuality in the lifelong, life-giving communion of marriage.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABMs)

Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABMs) are safe, effective, and personalized ways to postpone, avoid, or achieve pregnancy. It involves learning where the woman is at in her fertility cycle by paying attention to simple biological signs that are easily detected with a little training. There are also new trends and product developments in Fertility Awareness-Based Methods and FEMTECH, with wearable sensors that connect to smartphone apps.

99% Effective. With regard to spacing or limiting pregnancies, NFP/FABMs are over 99% effective when couples understand the methods, are motivated, and follow the guidelines. Many couples who have experienced infertility difficulties have overcome them, through close observation of the woman's cycles and with appropriate medical treatment.

Personalized for any woman. NFP/FABMs work for women of any age, and even for women with irregular cycles. Every woman learns how to understand her own body and its cycles, through one or more simple biological signs. With her husband, they discuss and track/record their signs and observations, gaining an awareness of and new appreciation for their shared fertility. If they want to conceive, they select days of fertility on which to make love; if they need to wait—they wait until the infertile times.

Evolving Technologies. More than ever – women are interested in understanding and tracking their cycles to monitor and manage their "overall" health. They are enabled by both apps and new medical technology, and one of the major forces of change is that the medical world is now identifying a woman's fertility (ovulation & menstruation) as her 5th vital sign.

With the rapidly expanding landscape of fertility apps, monitors, and sensors, you may be questioning if these technologies are approved by the Catholic Church and if they are safe and effective. Some of these technologies can be of great assistance to couples in avoiding or achieving a pregnancy while still living out God's plan for marital love. But we strongly suggest that the couple take a formal NFP/FABM course from a certified teacher and complete the designated curriculum, and do your research, since this is a growing and changing area that affects your lifestyle.

How can we learn more? You can learn NFP or an FABM in a few simple classes, offered as in-person or online classes. The classes are taught by experienced and caring instructors. For more information, contact the Archdiocese of New York Family Life Office at **646-794-3185** or visit archny.org/family-life/fertility-awareness-nfp.

For more extensive information on NFP or FABMs, visit:

- FACTS (Fertility Appreciation Collaborative to Teach the Science): <http://www.factsaboutfertility.org/what-is-charting/>
- Natural Womanhood: <https://naturalwomanhood.org/>

Facing and Planning Our Finances Together

Financial concerns are one of the most common sources of stress in marriage. As with many other areas, clear communication and an understanding of your partner's values can help avoid problems in your marriage based on finances. The traditional money issues become even more complex in the digital world of online spending. Take some time and review these questions with your partner:

1. Are we open and transparent with our finances at this time?
2. Will we share access and passwords to each other's financial accounts?
3. Are we both comfortable with how we handle our finances today?
4. Will we combine our income and expenses, or keep separate accounts?
5. Do we have, or plan to build, a short-term and long-term financial plan for our marriage?
 - a. Do we understand and agree on how we will spend our income?
 - b. Do we understand how budgeting, saving, and investing lead to financial stability and empowers us to achieve our dreams/goals (owning a home, IRA for retirement, education for children, vacations, etc.)?
 - c. Do we understand the benefits of engaging a financial advisor to help us with our planning?
6. Do we agree on how to manage our financial digital identity and funds (online access, paper statements, alerts, etc.)?
7. Do we have secure backups of all financial and critical documents (passwords, accounts numbers, policies, phone numbers, deeds, titles, etc.)?
8. Do we know our credit scores?
9. Do we have all the necessary (emergency) documents in place (will, power of attorney, healthcare proxy, disability insurance, life insurance with assigned beneficiaries, guardians for children, etc.)?
10. Do we understand how to navigate our health insurance?
 - a. Individual and family deductible
 - b. Copays
 - c. Critical issues that are not covered or require special riders for sports injuries and ER treatments?
 - d. Healthcare Flex Spending accounts
11. Do we understand our taxes and what options there are to reduce our taxable income? Do we understand the value of using a tax expert if we are not knowledgeable in this area?
12. Which charities do we support or plan to support?
 - a. Do we understand the need to support our Church?
 - b. Are we willing to set up an automatic (weekly/monthly) digital contribution?

Does the Family that Prays Together Really Stay Together?

Institute for Family Studies

ifstudies.org/blog/does-the-family-that-prays-together-really-stay-together

Blog posted by Ashley McGuire

APRIL 20, 2016

In religious circles, the old adage “The family that prays together stays together” still makes the rounds. But is it true?

A lot of research has been devoted to the question of whether religion is a force for good among today’s families, and while the findings are mixed, studies have found plenty of reason to believe that faith can be a powerful adhesive for families working hard not to come undone.

Regular religious service attendance is tied to lower divorce rates, for example, and religious institutions can be powerful intermediaries in helping families in crisis and promoting chastity and fidelity, which in turn affect social ills like out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce.

But the saying isn’t “The family that goes to church together...”—it’s “The family that prays together...”

What makes prayer special in family life, and in a day and age when families can hardly find time for dinner together, are any of them actually finding time to pray together?

There isn’t a lot of data on prayer specifically among families, but one 2015 survey found that 50 percent of couples never pray together outside of family meals. On the flip side, the other half of American couples do at least once a year, with 11 percent reporting that they do so daily and a third, overall, doing so at least monthly. The study found that the numbers for couples who worship together closely track those of couples who pray together. Older research found that at least one-fifth of respondents report participating in “extended prayer time” with other family members.

And people certainly are praying for their family; a Newsweek poll about prayer found that of those who do pray regularly, 82 percent pray for the “health or success of a child or family member” when they do so. Another poll found that a majority of those who pray report their family as the thing they pray most about. That same poll found that the most likely place a person will pray is in his or her own home.

That individual prayer can improve the lives of those who undertake it is a well-documented fact supported by even the secular, medical world. Its benefits can include reduced stress, increased self-awareness, better communication, and a more empathetic and forgiving attitude towards others.

It’s hardly a stretch to suggest those benefits would expand to families that then pray together. For starters, family prayer time is quality time together, time not spent in front of the television or a smartphone, but rather, time spent communicating on a deeply personal level. One study found that children with parents who pray more than once daily report better relationships with their parents, even if that prayer is not done with their children, implying that there is something contagious about the positive effects of prayer in family life. Another study found a positive correlation between increased trust and prayer time between couples.

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Other sociologists have argued that joint prayer can be a powerful mediation tool that leads couples to be more forgiving. As Mark Butler, a professor of marriage and family therapy at Brigham Young University, put it: “When people pray (about tensions in their relationship) they are helped to see their part in the problem. They’re helped to see what they can do themselves to make a difference. And they are helped to soften. All these things help with conflict resolution.” The Pew Research Center routinely finds that a lot of Americans pray every day and consider prayer to be very important. Most often, discussion about prayer and its benefits is focused on the individual. But the fact that individuals who pray often do so for their families and in their own homes suggests that prayer has a naturally family-oriented component. And the data points to only benefits for couples and families that pray together, supporting the idea that prayer may very well help families stay together. For faith leaders and clergy looking to have a positive impact on family cohesion, offering believers simple and concrete ways to practice family prayer inside the home could make a world of difference.

Interfaith Marriages: Questions to Discuss

Special attention should be paid by an interfaith couple to the role of religion in their lives together. Now is the time to deal with reality, to recognize that some effort may be needed for a successful interfaith marriage, to think about your differences, and to decide about the children's religious upbringing.

Here are some questions that you should discuss between yourselves:

1. Does your partner respect your religious beliefs and practices?
2. Do you know enough about your partner's religious beliefs?
3. Do you wish your partner knew more about your religious beliefs?
4. Are you comfortable speaking about religion with your partner?
5. Is there any tension or conflict between you on issues of religious faith or practice?
6. Are you concerned that your marriage will make it more difficult for you to practice your religion?
7. Are you concerned that your partner does not go to religious services as often as you?
8. Do you consider it important to raise your children in your faith?
9. Have you discussed with your partner how you will teach religion to your children?
10. Are you concerned about the attitude of your partner's family towards your religious beliefs and practices?
11. Do you feel any pressure to convert to your spouse's faith?
12. (To the Catholic partner) Are you comfortable with living up to your promise to do all you can to baptize and raise your children as Catholics?
13. (To the non-Catholic partner) Are you concerned about your partner's promise to do all he/she can to baptize and raise the children as Catholics?
14. Have you discussed with your partner how much you will be involved (including financially) in the activities of your church or religious community?
15. What will you do to make sure that religious differences won't hurt your marriage?

For an online program that explores issues that may arise in an interfaith relationship, visit the following website: sandiego.edu/interchurch.

For additional information, you may also be interested in visiting the following sites:

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/dating-engaged/getting-serious/>

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/spouse-isnt-catholic/>

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/interfaith-marriages/>

Pornography: Facts and Dangers

As you have progressed through your Pre-Cana Day, the topics of love, intimacy, and sex have been discussed a number of times. We have tried to show you the beauty and power of God's plan for sex within your marriage, and we pray we have been successful in giving you the facts and creating the right images. However, considering the world today, we would be negligent if we did not make you aware of the dangers that the use of pornography imposes on your marriage.

The reality is that pornography has infiltrated and overwhelmed our social structures, norms, religious groups and our most basic sense of what is right and wrong. It has changed how men perceive women and how women perceive men. It has changed norms of social dating and courtship, which has also led to changing (corrupting) precepts of marriage and sexual love and intimacy.

A Barna Group¹ study done in 2016 found that more teens and young adults viewed "not recycling" as more immoral than viewing porn. If you desire to give totally of yourself in marriage and intimacy, then this shift in perception about porn is a real problem.

It is a problem because **pornography increases marital infidelity by more than 300%**². Further, a recent University of Oklahoma study revealed that couples who watched porn more than doubled their chance of getting divorced.

Our society portrays pornography (and masturbation) as an acceptable and even healthy option. However, the truth is that pornography essentially caters to one's own selfish gratification by reducing a person to his or her body parts and how they perform sexually. Pornography doesn't help make love - it destroys it.

We need to get this out in the open because one or both of you may have been exposed to porn. Why is this a problem? Pornography hijacks the brain's reward pathways by releasing huge amounts of dopamine and endorphins, just like an addiction to heroin or cocaine. This burns the pornographic images onto the user's memory, wiring together what is seen with the feelings of arousal and satisfaction. This builds a new brain map, dictating to the user a different kind of attractiveness to cause arousal, as well as a different expectation from his/her partner.

Exposure to pornography does not always result in addiction but it will always affect the intimacy in a relationship, as well as the health of the consumer. A marriage in which one partner struggles with pornography or a sexual compulsion is commonly plagued by problems of sensitivity, anxiety, secrecy, and isolation.

So, you as wife and husband need to determine what the dynamics of your relationship are going to be, and what the lifelong impact of these dynamics is on your marriage, on your most intimate relationship.

Essentially, what will transcend through your family for years to come? The challenge for you is to surrender to the love God has blessed you with and look upon one another with unconditional selflessness. You need to be honest with yourself and your partner, because your marriage needs to be free from any secrets and lies that will destroy trust and the bond that seals your love and commitment.

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/porn-in-the-digital-age-new-research-reveals-10-trends/>
<https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>

² http://marrpedia.org/effects_of_pornography_on_marriage
<https://www.movieguide.org/news-articles/the-effects-of-pornography-on-individuals-marriage-family-and-community.html>

Porn today is nothing new; it has been around for a long time. However, in today's digital world, it's power is magnified to a level that was unimaginable just a few years ago. Further, it continues to creep forward lowering our standards, creating unreal expectations/images of what life is, and exposing us (especially our children) to digital power that does rewire our brains.

We have talked about the impact of these degraded cultural norms on your marriage, but let's take it forward and discuss the potential impact on the children you may be blessed with.

Children watch and observe everything

A son sees how his father looks (and treats) his mother. A daughter watches and sees how her mother treats her father. Your children can see and feel the warmth, commitment, compassion, and empathy as well as the presence or absence of respect and honor.

How you look at one another within your marriage will transcend how your family develops. Evil is real, and Satan is real and will work through you to attack your children. Internet Porn may be the most powerful means the devil has ever created to pull you, your friends and your children (should you be blessed with them), away from God.

So, all of these words, warnings and advice are basically meaningless unless you can pull them into your heart and embrace the standards God has given us to live by. God's commandments and plan for love and marriage are meant to protect you and your children from the evil forces that exist in the world.

Technology has and will continue to change our lives. Although the technology creates both positive and negative results, the good news is that God gives us free will, so we make the world. As St. Augustine said, "it's no use whining about the times, because we are the times." Our actions and behavior matter. Our choices matter. Our lives matter. It's through us that God acts in society and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is carried forward. So we need to own that mission. And only when we do, will anything change for the better.

So if you struggle with pornography, consider the negative consequences for your health and the health of your marriage. It is never too late to make a change. God's love for you is immense and constant. Nothing is too great for Him to forgive and to heal. If you are Catholic, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is available for you to begin your journey of internal healing and self-forgiveness, and to gain the spiritual strength to combat the sin of pornography. There are also many great resources available that anyone can explore and try.

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Online Resources:

- **Integrity restored (integrityrestored.com)**
Provides education and resources to break free from pornography, heal relationships and assist parents in preventing and responding to pornography exposure.
- **The Porn Effect (theporneffect.com)**
Provides articles, tools and community to help those struggling and inform those who want to learn more about the battle with pornography.
- **NoFap (nofap.com)**
Community-based porn-recovery website helps its users connect with a supportive community of individuals determined to quit porn use and free themselves from compulsive sexual behaviors.

Books:

Delivered: True Stories of Men & Women Who Turned from Porn to Purity

by Matt Fradd (Catholic Answers Press, 2014)

Fortify: A Step Toward Recovery

by Fight the New Drug (O.W.L. Publishing, 2013)

The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography

by Wendy & Larry Maltz (William Morrow Paperbacks, 2010)

The Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography

by Matt Fradd (Ignatius Press, 2017) (available as an ebook at Formed.org)

For those seeking further education:

Fight The New Drug (fightthenewdrug.com)

Provides clear education, tools and resources to help those affected by and struggling with pornography.

Your Brain on Porn (yourbrainonporn.com)

This site grew out of a decade of research analysis on the effects of sex on the brain and six years of listening to recovering porn addicts.

Hope and Healing After Abortion

Abortion tends to be treated as a political issue in our society, but more importantly, it is a profound personal experience. Abortion takes the life of the unborn child and grievously wounds the mother of that child. It also hurts the child's biological father, and can have painful ramifications throughout the families of both the mother and the father. Remember that God loves you! Nothing is too great for Him to forgive and heal. If you are a Catholic, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the perfect place to begin a journey of internal healing and forgiveness. If you are not Catholic, the other resources listed below are available to you.

Post Abortion Resources within the local Archdiocese of New York area:

- For one-day or two-day retreats to address post-abortion grief and to begin spiritual healing, please visit the Sisters of Life at: sistersoflife.org/healing-after-abortion/ or contact them directly at hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org or **866.575.0075**.
- For referrals to peer groups, post abortion ministries, therapists, counselors, or clergy, please visit Lumina Hope and Healing at: www.postabortionhelp.org or contact founder Theresa Bonapartis at **877.586.4621** or via her email at Lumina@postabortionhelp.org.

Unresolved grief will affect your marriage. We strongly urge you to begin this journey of healing before your wedding day, so that you don't bring the pain of an unacknowledged abortion into your marriage.

Words of Hope and Encouragement from Pope Saint John Paul II

"I would like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in any cases it was painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not have been healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give into discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you His forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child." *Evangelium Vitae* 99

About Our Special Contributors

Dr. Greg Bottaro

Dr. Bottaro is a clinical psychologist practicing in Connecticut and also serves the greater New York Metropolitan area and many others through online therapy. He received Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Institute for the Psychological Sciences, a graduate school in Arlington, VA that integrates Catholic philosophy and theology with sound psychology.

Before finishing his degree, he discerned a religious vocation with the Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFRs). He lived four years in the Bronx, serving the poor in the tradition of St. Francis. These years were emotionally, spiritually, and professionally formative as Dr. Bottaro tested his vocation and ultimately felt the prompting of God's will to pursue family life.

Dr. Greg Bottaro is the Executive Director and Founder of the CatholicPsych Institute. He formed the CatholicPsych Institute in 2012 to connect Catholics around the world with therapists trained to integrate the faith with psychological sciences.

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Dr. Anne Nolte

Dr. Nolte is a board-certified family physician with an area of concentration in women's health and fertility. She is a Certified FertilityCare™ Medical Consultant and FertilityCare™ Instructor.

She is the co-founder of the National Gianna Center for Women's Health and Fertility, the first pro-life, faith-based women's medical center in New York City. She is also the co-founder of the John Paul II Center for Women, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the women, couples and teenagers about the Christian vision of the dignity of women, the meaning of human sexuality and the benefits of natural family planning. She serves as the Vice President of the New York Guild of the Catholic Medical Association (and past President), Chair of the Pro-life Commission of the Archdiocese of New York, and former Representative to the United Nations for the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations.

She is a graduate of Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, PA and completed her undergraduate studies at Villanova University. She currently lives with her husband, Joe, in New York City.

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Fr. Dan O'Reilly

Fr. O'Reilly is pastor of Corpus Christi Parish, which is Columbia University's parish, and the Catholic chaplain at Columbia University. He was born in Manhattan and raised in the Bronx. He attended Regis High School in New York City and majored in philosophy at Princeton University before entering the seminary for the Archdiocese of New York.

After earning master's degrees in theology and divinity from St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, he was ordained a priest in 2003 and appointed parochial vicar at Resurrection Church in Rye, New York. He has served as Director of Campus Ministry for the Archdiocese of New York, Spiritual Director for the St. John Neumann Seminary College in Yonkers, and Catholic Campus Minister at SUNY Maritime College in the Bronx.

Follow Fr. Dan on Twitter: [@FrDanOReilly](https://twitter.com/FrDanOReilly)

Phone: 212-666-9350

Corpus Christi Parish: 529 West 121st Street, New York, New York 10027 (just east of Broadway)

Post-Cana Connections

Archdiocese of New York Family Life Office:

archny.org/family-life

Facebook: [/NYFamilyLife](https://www.facebook.com/NYFamilyLife)

646-794-3185

Archdiocese of New York Young Adult Office:

archny.org/young-adult-outreach

Facebook: [/CatholicNYC](https://www.facebook.com/CatholicNYC)

For Your Marriage website: foryourmarriage.org

Catholic online resources: Formed.org (Where you accessed “Beloved” and “Symbolon”)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (online versions below)

- www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM
- ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism

Theology of the Body resources:

- theologyofthebody.net
- *Men and Women He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Book & Media, 2006)
- *Theology of the Body for Beginners: A basic Introduction to Pope John Paul II’s Sexual Revolution, Revised Edition* (Ascension Press, 2009)

Other helpful resources:

- Catholic Marriage Coaching. Visit createdformission.com.
- *Love in Marriage: Pope Francis on living and growing in love* (Magnificat, 2017)
- *Contraception and Catholicism: What the Church Teaches and Why* (Pauline Books & Media, 2013)
- *Prayer for Beginners* (Ignatius Press, 2000)
- The Gottman Institute: A research-based approach to relationships. Visit gottman.com.
- *The Five Love Languages*. Visit 5lovelanguages.com.
- *The Seven Levels of Intimacy* (Beacon Publishing; 2nd ed. edition, July 17, 2015)
- Ron L. Deal, LMFT, LPC. Visit FamilyLife.com/blended and SmartStepfamilies.com.
- Domestic Violence Awareness: archny.org/family-life/training-resources/additional-resources/

Pre-Cana videos are available for today’s participants: archny.org/family-life/training-resources

(Select: “**Joined in Love**” **Post-Cana Couples (English)**). Password: **Post-CanaCouple**).

If you would like to view the **PowerPoint slides** shown at Pre-Cana, contact the Family Life Office at 646-794-3188, or email FLRLEvents@NYFamilyLife.org.

- THANK YOU -

We hope each of you will continue to more fully encounter Christ in the celebration of the Mass (Eucharist)!

AN ACT OF COSMIC LOVE AT THE HEART OF CREATION

*It is in the **Eucharist** that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. [I]t is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the **Eucharist**, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the **Eucharist** is itself an **act of cosmic love**...The **Eucharist** joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation.*

Pope Francis, Laudato Si (On Care for Our Common Home, 236)



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archny.org/family-life
646-794-3185