Opening Prayer Service

Gather

Rings are exchanged by a couple during the sacrament of marriage. The ring is a public sign of commitment. It witnesses to the world that the person wearing the ring is in a committed, forever promised, relationship with their husband or wife. In North American culture sometimes there is a series of rings – a promise ring which signifies the couple is seriously pursuing a relationship with each other, an engagement ring which signifies that the couple is committed to getting married to each other, and the wedding rings which are blessed and offered to each other by the couple at their wedding.

What does a ring have to tell us about love and faithfulness? Like a ring, God’s love for us has no beginning or end. A ring can also be likened to the circle of life, all life flows from one moment into the next, connected as human beings on our path to living and seeking God’s eternal life.

Our gathering prayer for this learning session on marriage invites us to remember and to celebrate God’s faithful love and to remember and to celebrate the many married couples who witness that faithful love to us.

And so we pray.

Opening Prayer

God of grace, source of all love, you love us more than we will ever be able to imagine. Help us to be people who love others faithfully so that all may know of the Good News of Jesus. We ask this prayer through the intercession of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Listen

I John 4:7-12

“It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God’s faithful love” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1648).

Respond

Is love an emotion, a feeling that comes and goes and makes us feel warm inside? Or is it a decision to care for another? Is it a commitment to be responsible for one’s self and to be supportive of another in relationship?

The sacrament of marriage witnesses to us the depth, power, and commitment of love.

All of us are called to witness God’s faithful love, but today we particularly celebrate the witness of God’s love through the Sacrament of Marriage. As we continue in prayer, I invite you to write on the ribbon you have been given the name of a married couple who has witnessed to you or to your family God’s faithful love. Once you have the name written down, I invite you to come forward to attach your ribbon to the ring in our prayer center, a ring that reminds us that God’s faithful love always has been and always will be.

Go Forth

May God bless us with the abundant love of family and friends.

**Amen.**

May God bless us with patience and perseverance in loving all whom God places in our lives.

**Amen.**

May God bless us with the love of Jesus and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

Handout #1

Sharing the Story—Faith Sharing on Marriage

Large Group Presentation

Thank you for saying yes to sharing the story of your marriage during our learning session on the Sacrament of Marriage. Please use the questions below as a guide and feel comfortable to adapt the questions as needed. Be ready to speak *together* about your experience of marriage: the good moments, the challenging moments, the insights you have gleaned about marriage, and importantly how God and your faith have been a part of your marriage. If the parish has provided you with any reading materials on marriage, take time to review those especially in light of your own experience of the sacrament.

Practice sharing your reflections and remember the five-to-seven-minute time frame that you have to share your story.

Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage

1. How did you meet?

2. When in your relationship did you hear God calling you to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with each other?

3. How did the proposal of marriage take place?

4. How do you remember feeling the night before your wedding day?

5. What do you treasure most about your wedding day and the celebration of the sacrament?

6. What challenges have you had to face as a married couple?

7. What gifts and blessings are part of your relationship?

8. What humorous moments or learning moments surface for you?

9. How do you think marriage witnesses God’s faithful love to the people around you? How are faith and your relationship with God part of your marriage?

Handout # 2

Sharing the Story—Faith Sharing on Marriage

Small Group Presentation

Thank you for saying yes to sharing the story of your marriage through a group interview during our learning session on the sacrament of marriage. Please use the questions below to reflect on your experience of marriage. The table groups will be invited to use these questions as a starting point, and then add other questions as they surface. Be ready to speak *together* about your experience of marriage: the good moments, the challenging moments, the insights you have gleaned about marriage, and importantly how God and your faith have been a part of your marriage. You do not have to answer every question, and feel free to invite other couples or learners to share their wisdom on any of the questions raised. If the parish has provided you with any reading materials on marriage, take time to review those especially in light of your own experience of the sacrament.

Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage to Start the Table Interview Process

1. How did you meet?

2. When in your relationship did you hear God calling you to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with each other?

3. How did the proposal of marriage take place?

4. How do you remember feeling the night before your wedding day?

5. What do you treasure most about your wedding day and the celebration of the sacrament?

6. What challenges have you had to face as a married couple?

7. What gifts and blessings are part of your relationship?

8. What humorous moments or learning moments surface for you?

9. How do you think marriage witnesses God’s faithful love to those around you? How are faith and your relationship with God part of your marriage?

Handout #3

Sharing the Story—Faith Sharing on Marriage

Instructions and Initial Interview Questions for Group Use

A married couple has volunteered to join your table group to share with you their experience and insights about marriage. They have been given the following questions to guide your discussion, but feel free to generate other questions that you would like to explore with them.

They have the option to pass on any questions that you ask, and they may invite you to join them in answering the questions you raise.

Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage to Start the Table Interview Process

1. How did you meet?

2. When in your relationship did you hear God calling you to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with each other?

3. How did the proposal of marriage take place?

4. How do you remember feeling the night before your wedding day?

5. What do you treasure most about your wedding day and the celebration of the sacrament?

6. What challenges have you faced as a married couple?

7. What gifts and blessings are part of your relationship?

8. What humorous moments or learning moments surface for you?

9. How do you think marriage witnesses God’s faithful love to others? How are faith and your relationship with God part of your marriage?

Handout #4

God’s Faithful Love is Like

As Catholics we believe that marriage witnesses to us God’s faithful love for God’s people. The New Testament offers many stories and examples of what God’s faithful love is like. In this learning experience you are invited to read some of those stories and to discuss what God’s love is like as described in the stories. Read each story, then complete the phrase on the handout, “God’s love is like …”. Or fashion an image of God’s love using playdoh, before moving on to the next Scripture passage.

1. Read Luke 5:17-20 (Healing of a paralytic)

God’s love is like… persistent friends working to help you be healed …friends believing in what others think is impossible …

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. Read Luke 7:36-47 (Pardon of the Sinful Woman)

# God’s love is like…faithful service…loving touch…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Read Luke 10:29-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

God’s love is like… being inclusive…receiving care from a stranger…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. Read Luke 15:11-32 (Parable of the Prodigal Son)

God’s love is like…a parent always looking for their child …unending and never leaving us no matter what we do…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. Read Romans 8:31b-39 (Nothing is More Powerful than Love)

God’s love is like…always there for us…the only constant we have in our lives…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Handout #5

God’s Faithful Love is Like

As Catholics we believe that marriage witnesses to us God’s faithful love for God’s people. The New Testament offers many stories and examples of what God’s faithful love is like. In this learning experience you are invited to read some of those stories and to discuss what God’s love is like as described in the stories. Read each story, then complete the phrase on the handout, “God’s love is like …”. Or fashion an image using playdoh, before moving on to the next scripture passage.

1. Read Luke 5:17-20 (Healing of a paralytic)

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you.’

God’s love is like…persistent friends working to help you be healed …friends believing in what others think is impossible …

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Read Luke 7:36-47 (Pardon of the Sinful Woman)

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.’ Jesus spoke up and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Teacher,’ he replied, ‘Speak.’ ‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered, ‘I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’ Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’

# God’s love is like…faithful service…loving touch…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Read Luke 10:29-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

God’s love is like…inclusive…receiving care from a stranger…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Read Luke 15:11-32 (Parable of the Prodigal Son)

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate. ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”’

God’s love is like…a parent always looking for their child …unending and never leaving us no matter what we do…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Read Romans 8:31b-39 (Nothing is More Powerful than Love)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God’s love is like…always there for us…the only constant we have in our lives…

Our response: God’s love is like… \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Handout #6

Love Advice: Designing a Marriage Program Cover

Now that you have explored some images and examples of God’s faithful love from the New Testament, spend some time exploring together how we witness to God’s faithful love by expressing love in healthy ways in our relationships with others.

Using the card stock supplies that you have on your tables, you are now going to become marriage program design consultants. Your task is to design the front and back covers of a marriage program using words or images that speak of how we treat those we love in order to inspire the wedding guests to be the healthiest lovers they can be.

For example, you simply may want to use the open-ended phrase “We love by …” to help you in your design. Some things to include on your wedding programs are “We love by telling one another I love you.” “We love by being patient and kind.” “We love by putting others’ needs before our own.” and so on.

Before you actually start writing words or images on the program cover, talk together about some of the things you want to include and why. Feel free to use the space below to write down your ideas for the cover. Handout # 7

Love Song Challenge

Use the chart below to write the names of all the songs you know that have the word “love” in them. Continuing across the column, write what you think the song says love is or what love is about. Remembering the reflections shared by the married couples in the All Ages Opening and our exploration of God’s love as described through Scripture, in the final column examine the song through the lens of God’s love and what we as Catholics believe about love. Does the song agree or disagree with what we as Catholics believe love is about? Why or why not?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Song Title | What does it say love is or what love is about? | Does the song agree or disagree with what Catholics believe about love?  A=agree D=disagree | Why did you choose agree or disagree? How is the song in sync or not in sync with what we as Catholics believe about love? |
| 1. |  |  |  |
| 2. |  |  |  |
| 3. |  |  |  |
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| 10. |  |  |  |

(H-AH-1)

Handout # 8

Imagining Your 50th Wedding Anniversary Celebration

Imagine you are married (single people too!) and have been so for fifty years. You are attending your 50th wedding anniversary party that your friends or children have organized. Use the handout to express what you hope the guests at your celebration would be saying about you and the love your marriage witnessed to the world. How would you want them to describe the relationship you shared with your spouse? How would they describe the home you created? The children you raised?

Write down your reflections either as an individual or as a couple. Be prepared to share some of your reflections with others, as you are comfortable.

Handout # 9

The Rite of Marriage: Building a Home

[NOTE to designers: this handout needs to have the instructions on one page and a diagram of a house on another page. The house diagram needs to include all of the graphic elements in the instructions: a house in the middle of the page, space to draw a path up to the front door, a large front door, several large windows of various shapes, exposed foundation walls with circular markings like stones on them large enough for words to be written, a roof with space to write words/draw images on the shingles, a large mail box in the front left or right hand corner of the paper, and space around the house for flowers and trees to be drawn. ]

Entrance Procession and Welcome

The rite of marriage begins with the priest or presider welcoming the couple. This welcome occurs at the entrance of the church as the couple and their witnesses/attendants process in or it happens before the altar if the bride and groom choose to enter separately or walk down the aisle with their parents.

In the rite of marriage, the couple says AMEN to their desire to being married in the church in the presence of community and the community welcomes and supports them in their decision.

Draw a path to the door on your house worksheet. Line the pathway with words of welcome or ways that you would help people feel welcome to your home.

Opening Prayer

The priest or presider recites the gathering prayer and puts into God’s hands the needs of the couple being married and the needs of couples everywhere.

Through the gathering prayer the couple and the community say AMEN to God being the heart and support of married love.

On your house, decorate the front door with Christian symbols so the neighborhood knows Christians live in your house and that your house tries to be faithful to God’s ways.

Liturgy of the Word

The Word of God is shared with the community. The readings for the rite of marriage celebrate faithful love and commitment, and challenge all present to love others as God loves them. One common reading used in the marriage rite is: 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8.

“But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you still a more excellent way. If I speak in tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

What does the passage tell you about love?

Through the Liturgy of the Word we say AMEN to loving others as God has loved us, especially through the gift of his son Jesus. We say AMEN to listening to the Good News and we say AMEN to living the Good News in our world. We say AMEN to God’s love as expressed through his word, enabling us to love to the best of our abilities.

On your house, decorate the windows with stained glass images or words that remind you of what love is supposed to be about.

Consent

The priest or presider asks the couple if they have freely chosen to give themselves to one another in the sacrament of marriage.

The priest or presider says to the couple:

Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

The couple then shares their vows with one another.

Through the act of consent and the exchange of vows, the couple says AMEN to marriage and tells the Christian community that they will be faithful members of the community. In turn, the community says AMEN to being a community that cares for one another and helps people to live out their Christian commitments.

On your house, write on the foundation stones/basement walls the central actions that you think are important to creating a lasting marriage. For example, you might write prayer, fighting fair, or serving one another.

Blessing of the Rings

In the blessing of the rings, the presider actually blesses the couple, not the rings. The rings witness to the couple, the community, and the world that the couple is living in a relationship committed to each other through the practice and value of faithful loving.

Through the placing of the rings on each other’s hands the couple says AMEN to a lifelong commitment to each other with the support of the Christian community. Just as God’s love for all people has no beginning or end, so too the ring proclaims a couple’s commitment to long- term loving.

On a house, the roof is an important element that keeps the house warm, dry, and/or cool through all sorts of weather conditions. If the roof is well tended the house is protected and stays strong for a long time. On the roof of your house, write out virtues or qualities needed for faithful loving to keep a marriage commitment safe from the elements (e.g., patience, perseverance, courage, friends).

General Intercessions

The prayers of the faithful remind us that we stand before God with the needs of others, and that married life is not just about selfish love but about love that serves and welcomes others.

Through the general intercessions the couple and the community say AMEN to being a people of service to the kingdom of God, a people who are called to pray for and journey with all those in need.

On the mailbox in front of your house write the names of people or communities who are in need of your prayers.

Nuptial Blessing

The nuptial blessing says:

“Father, keep them always true to your commandments.

Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life. Give them strength from the gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others.

Bless them with children and help them to be good parents.

May they live to see their children’s children.

And after a happy old age, grant them fullness of life with the saints in the kingdom of heaven.”

Through the nuptial blessing the couple says AMEN to faithfulness, to being witnesses of their faith to the world and through that witness leading others to fullness of life in Christ.

Decorate the grounds of your home with flowers that contain words or images of hopes and blessings you seek for the married couples you know. Those hopes might include children, physical health, healing, and so on.

Handout # 10

The Rite of Marriage—What Choices Does It Contain?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element of the Rite | Choices | Which Choice Would You Make and Why? |
| 1. Procession  The priest or celebrant meets the couples at the church door or before the altar, and addresses them with words suited to the occasion and of Christian joy. The celebrant also welcomes the entire community. | A couple can choose to:  a. stand at the door of the church and welcome people as they come in, and process with the presider and attendants to the altar.  b. process in with the parent(s) – the bride with hers, the groom with his.  c. have the bride and her attendants process in with the groom waiting at the foot of the altar. |  |
| 2. Opening Prayer | There are four options to choose from for the opening prayer. | This choice is often made by the presider. |
| 3. Liturgy of the Word | The rite of marriage offers a wide collection of readings to choose from. Two readings are selected, a first reading from the Old Testament or the New Testament letters, and a reading from one of the four Gospels. Here are a few of your choices:  OLD TESTAMENT  Genesis 1:25-28, 31a  God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.  Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’  God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 2: 18-24 Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.  So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.’ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.  NEW TESTAMENT  Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39  What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:8a But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.  Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. Colossians 3:12-17 As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. 1 John 4:7-12 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.  GOSPEL  Matthew 5:1-12  When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:  ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 19:3-6 Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Mark 10:6-9 But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ John 15:9-12 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. | Which first reading would you choose and why?  Which Gospel reading would you choose and why?  Who would you choose to proclaim the first reading? |
| 4. Questions  During the first part of the consent, the priest or presider asks the couple if they have freely chosen to give themselves to one another in the Sacrament of Marriage.  The priest or presider says to the couple:  Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?  Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?  Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church? | This is a critical moment in the rite of marriage because the two individuals must enter freely into the Sacrament of Marriage of their own will.  There are no choices except for freely choosing to marry the person you feel called to marry!! |  |
| 5. Consent/Exchange of Vows  Though they are commonly known as the exchange of vows, the rite calls this a declaration of consent. | There are primarily two choices given in the rite.  Choice #1: Taking turns beginning with the bridegroom, the bride and groom can exchange the following vows:  A. “I, N., take you, N., to be my wife (husband). I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you all the days of my life.”  Or  B. “I, N., take you., for my lawful wife(husband), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.”  Choice #2: The presider may obtain consent from the couple through questions. Beginning again with the bridegroom, each is asked:  A. “N. do you take N. to be your wife (husband)? Do you promise to be true to him in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love him and honor him all the days of your life?”  Or  B. “N., do you take N., for your lawful wife (husband), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?” | Would you choose to profess your vows yourself or respond to the questions by the presider? Why?  Would you consider writing your own vows? |
| 6. Blessing of the Rings  In the blessing of the rings, in the second and third options, it is actually the couple being blessed. | Option One  “May the Lord bless these rings which you give to each other as the sign of your love and fidelity. Amen.”  Option Two  “Lord, bless these rings which we bless in your name. Grant that those who wear them may always have a deep faith in each other. May they do your will and always live together in peace, good will, and love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”  Option Three  “Lord, bless and consecrate N. and N. in their love for each other. May these rings be a symbol of true faith in each other, and always remind them of their love.  We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.” | Which option would you choose? Why? |
| 7. Exchange of Rings  The rings are given to each other in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – a reminder of our baptismal commitments, “ I baptize you in the name of the Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Marriage is a vocational response to God’s invitation to live out our baptismal commitment. | Beginning with the bridegroom, the ring is placed on the spouse’s ring finger while saying:  “N. take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. “ |  |
| 8. General Intercessions  The community prays for the couple that has been married as well as other prayer needs and requests. | Often deceased family members are prayed for as well as sick family members or others in the world or local community needing prayers. | Whom would you want to include in the prayers at your wedding? |
| 8. Liturgy of the Eucharist | As the rite says, when two Catholics marry the “celebration of marriage should normally be within the Mass…for holy communion above all else is the source of love and lifts us up into communion with our Lord and with one another.”  (Rite of Marriage, Introduction Note #6) | Would you celebrate your marriage within the Mass? Why or why not? |
| 9. Nuptial Blessing  Through this blessing the presider implores God’s blessing on the wedding covenant. | There are several options given, too lengthy to include here. Here are some excerpts:  #121.  Holy Father, creator of the universe, maker of man and woman in your own likeness, source of blessing for married life, we humbly pray to you for this woman, who today is united with her husband in this sacrament of marriage. May your fullest blessing come upon her and her husband so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love (and enrich you Church with their children). Lord, may they both praise you when they are happy and turn to you in their sorrows. May they be glad that you help them in their work and know that you are with them in their need. May they pray to you in the community of the Church, and be your witnesses in the world. May they reach old age in the company of their friends, and come at last to the kingdom of heaven, (we ask this) through Christ our Lord. | The Nuptial blessing is often chosen by the presider. |
| 10. Solemn Blessing  The celebration of marriage with or without Eucharist is concluded with a solemn blessing of the couple. | Again, there are many options given, too lengthy to include here. Here is one option:  #127.  May the Lord Jesus, who was a guest at the wedding in Cana, bless you and your families and friends. Amen.  May Jesus, who loved his Church to the end, always fill your hearts with his love. Amen.  May he grant that, as you believe in his resurrection, so may you wait for him in joy and hope. Amen.  And may almighty God bless you all, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. | The Solemn blessing is often chosen by the presider. |

Handout #11

The Rite of Marriage: Exploring Its Theology

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Rite of Marriage** | **Theology** | **Implications and Challenges** |
| Entrance Procession and Welcome  The rite of marriage begins with the priest or presider welcoming the couple. This welcome occurs at the entrance of the church as the couple and their witnesses/attendants process in or it happens before the altar if the bride and groom choose to enter separately or walk down the aisle with their parents. | In the rite of marriage, the couple says AMEN to their desire to being married in the church in the presence of community. The community welcomes and supports them in their decision. | Why do you think it is important that couples freely choose to celebrate the sacrament of marriage? Are there times when they need to be encouraged NOT to?  What do you think the role of the community is in supporting the couple in their choice of a Catholic marriage? |
| Opening Prayer  The priest or presider recites the gathering prayer and puts into God’s hands the needs of the couple being married and the needs of couples everywhere. | Through the gathering prayer the couple and the community say AMEN to God being the heart and support of married love. | How do we help married couples to nurture faith as part of their marriage commitment?  If you are married, how is that a challenge for you? |
| Liturgy of the Word  The Word of God is shared with the community. The readings for the rite of marriage celebrate faithful love, commitment, and challenge all present to love others as God and Jesus love them. | Through the Liturgy of the Word, we say AMEN to loving others as God has loved us, especially through the gift of his son Jesus. We say AMEN to listening to the Good News and we say AMEN to living the Good News in our world. We say AMEN to God’s love as expressed through his word, enabling us to love to the best of our abilities. | Which Scripture readings do you remember from having attended weddings?  Why is Scripture an important part of a wedding celebration or any celebration of the sacraments? |
| Consent  The priest or presider asks the couple if they have freely chosen to give themselves to one another in the sacrament of marriage.  The priest or presider says to the couple:  Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?  Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?  Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?  The couple then shares their vows with one another. | Through the act of consent and the exchange of vows, the couple says AMEN to marriage and tells the Christian community that they will be faithful members of the community. In turn, the community says AMEN to being a community that cares for one another and helps people to live out their Christian commitments. | What do you think a community can do to support married couples in living out their vowed marriage commitment? What gathered or non-gathered (e.g., a newsletter that explores marital issues) options might a parish consider? |
| Blessing of the Rings  In the blessing of the rings, the presider actually blesses the couple, not the rings. The rings witness to the couple, the community, and the world that the couple is living in a relationship committed to each other through the practice and value of faithful loving. | Through the placing of the rings on each other’s hands the couple says AMEN to a lifelong commitment to each other with the support of the Christian community. Just as God’s love for all people has no beginning or end, so too the ring proclaims a couple’s commitment to long-term loving. | What values and practices help someone to make a life commitment of faithful love to another person? |
| Nuptial Blessing  The nuptial blessing says:  “Father, keep them always true to your commandments.  Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life. Give them strength from the Gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others.  Bless them with children and help them to be good parents.  May they live to see their children’s children.  And after a happy old age, grant them fullness of life with the saints in the kingdom of heaven.” | Through the nuptial blessing the couple says AMEN to faithfulness, to being witnesses of their faith to the world and through that witness leading others to fullness of life in Christ. | How have you seen marriage witness God’s faithful love to the world? |

Handout # 12

Wreath of Blessing—Supporting the Sacrament of Marriage

Some marriages are long and fruitful; other marriages are not life-giving or are not entered into with full conscious consent and end in divorce and annulment. As a Christian community it is our responsibility to support married couples as best as we can so that they can be the healthiest couple possible.

All of us, young and old, can be creative and generous in how we support the sacrament of marriage. We are going to explore a few of the challenges and teachings about marriage and create a marriage blessing wreath to give to a couple who is preparing for marriage.

Made for Each Other

“Man and woman were made for each other—not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons” (*CCC*#372).

Communion means union. It means to be in community with another. What do you think it means to be in community with someone else? What does it mean to be a member of a community? What communities are you a member of (e.g., sports, school, church)? Is a community self-serving or does it exist to be in service to the world?

What blessing would you pray for an engaged couple in relation to being a communion of persons? Would you pray that their love for each other pushes them to love the world more? Would you pray that their communion of persons serves those in need?

Write a prayer of blessing on one of your hearts and attach it to your wreath. Examples might include: “May you be blessed with …courage to serve the world …love that includes others”, etc.

Intimate Partnership

“Marriage is a community of love…an intimate partnership of life and love…” (*Gaudium et Spes* 47)

What does it mean to be in partnership with someone? Have you ever asked someone to be your partner in anything? A school project, a field trip, a committee? Does it mean treating them as an equal? Does it mean a 50—50 sharing? What do you think partnership in marriage means?

What blessing would you pray for an engaged couple in relation to being in intimate partnership? Would you pray that they are able to fully trust one another? Would you pray that they risk and share important things with one another?

Write a prayer of blessing on one of your hearts and attach it to your wreath. Examples might be: “May you be blessed with …courage to trust…forgiving hearts”, and so on.

Free Consent

“Yet although matrimony is of its very nature of divine institution, the human will, too, enters into it and performs a most noble part. For each individual marriage, …arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses; and this free act of the will, by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage, is so necessary to constitute true marriage that it cannot be supplied by any human power” (*Casti Connubii* #6).

True marriage involves one person freely choosing to enter into a life commitment with another person who also freely enters into the relationship. God created all of us with free will, which means he entrusts us with the ability, through prayer and good decision-making, to choose how we will live out our commitment or vocation to him. God calls some people to marriage, some to single life, some to be priests or bishops or deacons, and some to be sisters or brothers in the religious life. Listening to God’s call and freely responding is part of every vocation.

What blessing would you pray for an engaged couple in relation to being good decision-makers? Would you pray for wisdom? Would you pray for families and friends that share honestly about the marriage being entered into?

Write a prayer of blessing on one of your hearts and attach it to your wreath. Examples include: “May you be blessed with …quiet moments to listen to God …or an open heart to respond freely to God’s invitation”, and so on.

Daily Choice

“This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; it must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves …so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbor" (*Casti Connubii* #23).

Sometimes when we see couples who seem so in love with each other we get caught up in forgetting how much work it is to love other people. Do you think love is a feeling or a choice, or both? Marriage is a daily choice to love the people in their lives. Choosing to love others helps us to love God and our neighbors even more.

What blessing would you pray for an engaged couple in relation to choosing each day to love one another? Would you pray for patience to see beyond each other’s foibles, would you pray for kindness and generosity to place other’s needs before their own?

Write a prayer of blessing on one of your hearts and attach it to your wreath. Examples include: “May you be blessed with patience and humor…charity and kindness”, and so on.

Witness to God’s Love

“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.90 Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes” (*CCC* #1604).

This teaching from the catechism reminds us of the goodness of married love and challenges married couples and the community to remember how married love, celebrated through a sacrament, calls couples to witness God’s unfailing love to the world. What a responsibility!

What blessing would you pray for an engaged couple for living out their responsibility, as professed through the sacrament of marriage, to witness to God’s unfailing love in the world? Would you pray for a community that wraps them in support to be the best couple they can be? Would you pray for humble hearts that see their love for each other as a gift from God?

Write a prayer of blessing on one of your hearts and attach it to your wreath. Examples are: “May you be blessed with humility and generosity …supportive family and friends”, and so on.

Your Own Blessings

Take a few minutes to fill in your wreath with blessings of your own choosing. What blessings in general do you wish for couples entering into marriage? What are the most important things for them to remember?

Write the blessings on hearts and attach them to your wreath.

Handout #13

Exploring Church Teachings on Marriage

Quote # 1

“Yet although matrimony is of its very nature of divine institution, the human will, too, enters into it and performs a most noble part. For each individual marriage, inasmuch as it is a conjugal union of a particular man and woman, arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses; and this free act of the will, by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage, is so necessary to constitute true marriage that it cannot be supplied by any human power” (*Casti Connubii*, #6).

Definitions

Conjugal union: marriage

Divine institution: instituted, therefore created or conceived, by God

Think About It

What is the quote saying about free will and its impact on people celebrating the sacrament of marriage? What is it saying about who chooses to enter into marriage?

Live It

How can couples entering into marriage be assisted in their decision to marry each other?

Quote # 2

“Therefore the sacred partnership of true marriage is constituted both by the will of God and the will of man. From God comes the very institution of marriage, the ends for which it was instituted, the laws that govern it, the blessings that flow from it; while man, through generous surrender of his own person made to another for the whole span of life, becomes, with the help and cooperation of God, the author of each particular marriage, with the duties and blessings annexed thereto from divine institution” (*Casti Connubii*, #9).

Definitions

Divine institution: instituted, therefore created or conceived, by God

Sacred: of God, holy

Think About It

What do you think the document means when it says that humanity (man) is the author of their own marriage? What do you think sacred partnership means?

Live It

How could couples entering into marriage be challenged to see that their marriage is what they, through the grace of God, create? How could couples be supported in living out marriage as a sacred partnership?

Quote # 3

“This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbor, on which indeed "dependeth the whole Law and the Prophets" (*Casti Connubii*, #23).

Definitions

Interior life: what is going on in one’s heart and prayer life

Virtue: the quality of doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong

Think About It

How does the committed love of another person strengthen someone to be loving to others? How does a marriage commitment include helping one’s spouse develop their spiritual life?

Live It

What tools and resources for prayer could a parish community (that includes you!) provide to couples preparing for marriage or who are already married? What service projects does or could the parish provide couples to work on together?

Quote # 4

“No difficulty can arise that justifies the putting aside of the law of God which forbids all acts intrinsically evil. There is no possible circumstance in which husband and wife cannot, strengthened by the grace of God, fulfill faithfully their duties and preserve in wedlock their chastity unspotted” (*Casti Connubii*, #61).

Definitions

Intrinsically evil: absolutely no love or respect for other human beings or created life

Chastity: abstention from sexual intercourse outside of marriage

Think About It

If God’s support helps us to do all that we need to do, how does one explain marriages that end in annulment or divorce?

Live It

How can you personally support couples who are struggling to live out their marriage commitment? What can a parish do to help couples fulfill their marriage commitments?

Quote # 5

“By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church.

Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers. Of this salvation event marriage, like every sacrament, is a memorial, actuation, and prophecy: "As a memorial, the sacrament gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children. As actuation, it gives them the grace and duty of putting into practice in the present, towards each other and their children, the demands of a love which forgives and redeems. As prophecy, it gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ"

(*Familiaris Consortio*, #13).

Definitions

Sacramentality: of the grace of God and reflecting God’s goodness

Indissoluble: unable to be dissolved, intended to be a permanent life-long commitment

Think About It

How do you feel about the sacrament of marriage when you hear it compared to Christ’s relationship with the church and compared to God’s love for his people?

The quote talks about marriage being a present witness and a future witness. What does it witness to in the present, and what does it hold out in hope for the future?

Live It

How can you or the parish community help married couples to see their everyday lives of caring for a home and serving others as holy and important?

Quote # 6

“Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking” (*Church in the Modern World*, #51).

Definitions

Procreation: creating children

Think About It

What does this quote say about married couples and the creation or adoption of children? How does this quote affirm couples who end up childless?

Live It

How can you or the parish community support married couples who end up childless? How can they be affirmed and valued in their Christian witness to marriage and be included in programs that the parish offers?

Quote # 7

“This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses. By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1615).

“Every loving is a dying—a dying to my own time, comfort, convenience, wants, needs, concerns, interests. Every loving is a dying to self-interest and self-aggrandizement in an act of generosity and self-giving” (Kathleen Hughes).

We say Amen to love and to strength to commit to one another, to loving as God loves, to creating not a house but a hospitable home, extending our love to a wide community, to love, honor, cherish in and through Christ.

Think About It

What dying does a married couple have to be willing to do in order to witness God’s faithful love to each other and to the world?

Live It

How can you witness to self-giving? How can you support married couples in their self-giving?

Quote # 8

“In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ.120 In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself for ever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up.121 It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but "one body" in Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1621).

Think About It

How are all sacraments connected to Eucharist?

Live It

How could non-Catholic wedding guests be intentionally welcomed and included at a Catholic wedding celebrated in the context of a mass?

Quote # 9

This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement:134

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church.

- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children.

- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses).

- The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1631).

Definitions

Ecclesiastical : of the church, so the marriage form is approved by the Catholic Church in the context of a Catholic community.

Think About It

Why does a public “I do”, proclaimed it front of a Catholic minister and surrounded by a community of family and friends, help couples to be faithful in their commitment?

Live It

Weddings are often by invitation only yet are celebrated in the parish. How could a parish extend a welcome to the couple and their guests?

Closing Prayer Service

Gather

Loving God, thank you for loving us. Thank you for choosing us to be in faithful relationship with you. Help us to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

Listen

## 1 John 4:16

“So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”

Respond: Blessing of Married Couples

Invite, using the progression listed below, married couples to stand either where they are or at the front or center of the gathering:

If you have been married less than two years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married two to five years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married six to 15 years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married 16-25 years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married 26-40 years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married 41-50 years, please stand and remain standing.

If you have been married longer than 50 years, please stand and remain standing.

Everyone not standing yet, please stand and extend your hand in blessing:

May the Lord Jesus, who was a guest at the wedding in Cana, bless you and your families and friends. Amen.

May Jesus, who loved his Church to the end, always fill your hearts with his love. Amen.

May he grant that, as you believe in his resurrection, so may you wait for him in joy and hope. Amen.

And may almighty God bless you all, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Rite of Marriage #127)

Go Forth