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Syllabus Handouts

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Our Spouse: Entrepreneurs – Together With The Same Goal

Objective

Every relationship involves some type of risk. Our relationship with our spouse is no different and the risks can be more extreme than any entrepreneurial business venture. However, the important goal we can share with our spouse is the goal of building a common relationship with God.

Bible Readings

1. Philippians 3:12-14:

12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

2. Philippians 2:1-4:

1If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 820-821

Catechism 820

"Christ bestowed unity on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time." Christ always gives his Church the gift of unity, but the Church must always pray and work to maintain, reinforce, and perfect the unity that Christ wills for her. This is why Jesus himself prayed at the hour of his Passion, and does not cease praying to his Father, for the unity of his disciples: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me." The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit.

Catechism 821

Certain things are required in order to respond adequately to this call:

- a permanent renewal of the Church in greater fidelity to her vocation; such renewal is the driving-force of the movement toward unity;
- conversion of heart as the faithful "try to live holier lives according to the Gospel"; for it is the unfaithfulness of the members to Christ's gift which causes divisions;
- prayer in common, because "change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism;'"
- fraternal knowledge of each other;
- ecumenical formation of the faithful and especially of priests;
- dialogue among theologians and meetings among Christians of the different churches and communities;
- collaboration among Christians in various areas of service to mankind. "Human service" is the idiomatic phrase.

Small Group Questions

Although our relationship with our spouse is not a business in the same sense as a company or a corporation it is still a unique partnership

1. How does your relationship with your spouse show or express unity?
2. What do you and your spouse do to encourage one another in your faith?
3. As a unified couple is there anything you do to help others grow in their faith?

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Teaching Our Children The Importance Of God, Family And Friends

Objective

When some people think of balancing the budget for the big payout their thoughts may turn to financial securities in our golden years. We would like you to consider a different type of treasure. The treasures found in the joys of seeing your children grow in the love and respect of God, Family and Friends.

Bible Readings

1. I Corinthians 15:3-4: "God"

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

2. Acts 10:1-4: "Family"

¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" ⁴Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

3. Proverbs 18:24: "Friend"

²⁴ A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 198 "God"

Our profession of faith begins with God, for God is the First and the Last, the beginning and the end of everything. The Credo begins with God the Father, for the Father is the first divine person of the Most Holy Trinity; our Creed begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works.

2. Paragraph 2207 "Family"

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life.

3. Paragraph 1697 "Friend"

of the Holy Spirit, the interior Master of life according to Christ, a gentle guest and friend who inspires, guides, corrects, and strengthens this life

Small Group Questions

Our Children growing in to respectable adults is the result of years of striving to be good parents - or - The Big Pay Out

1. Can you think of ways your life expresses or offers an example of faith in God as well as the importance of family and friends?
2. What do your children see you do that offers a look or view of God - Family - Friends?
3. Do you think your children understand the importance of God - Family - Friends?

Reminders

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The Trinity in Our Lives

Objective

God - Church - Us: A Team Sport Without a Handicap

Some have heard that life is a game and everyone has their own part to play. An important idea to keep in mind is that when you are a player on God's team you're playing with out a handicap. God knows all of the players, their weaknesses and their strengths. When God is in charge of the team there is no handicap.

Bible Readings

1. Hebrews 9:24: "God"
24For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.
2. 1 John 2:1-2: "God"
1My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for[a] the sins of the whole world.
3. Colossians 1-16-18: "Church"
16For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:20 "Church"
20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.
5. 1 Peter 2:9 "Us - People"
9But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 198 "God"
Our profession of faith begins with God, for God is the First and the Last, the beginning and the end of everything. The Credo begins with God the Father, for the Father is the first divine person of the Most Holy Trinity; our Creed begins with the creation of heaven and earth, for creation is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works.
2. Paragraph 752 "Church"
Christian usage, the word "church" designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers
3. Paragraph 761 "Us - People"
The gathering together of the People of God began at the moment when sin destroyed the communion of men with God, and that of men among themselves. The gathering

Small Group Questions

1. How do I view myself in relationship to God as well as my relationship with God?
2. When I celebrate the Mass do I feel a part of the church community or am I simply on my own journey?

3. As a people of God do I consider my journey private, just me and God -or- is my journey with members of God's people?

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Am I Putting Dad Last?

Objective

As the family leader I am most able to determine its spiritual, social, and financial atmosphere through my actions. How do I sincerely place members of my family above me and my desires? What do I do to be sure that I am not keeping score or manipulating situations to my advantage, rather teaching through humility.

Bible Readings

1. Romans 12: 1-12

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.

2 And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

3 For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.

4 For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office:

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.

6 And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith;

7 or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching;

8 or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honor preferring one another;

11 in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer;

2. 1 Kings 3:10-14

Catechism Readings

1. Part III, Section One; Article 7: 1808-1809 (page 444)

1808 Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. "The Lord is my strength and my song."⁷⁰ "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."⁷¹

1809 Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: "Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart."⁷² Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: "Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites."⁷³ In the New Testament it is called "moderation" or "sobriety." We ought "to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world."⁷⁴

To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).⁷⁵

Small Group Questions

1. What do you do to make sure that you are placing others before you?
2. Do your children believe that you are sacrificing for them? How do they understand this without you “laying a guilt trip” on them?
3. How do you manage the line between putting others first and not being taken advantage of?

Recommended Resources

1. Rediscovering Catholicism, by Matthew Kelly, pages 27-29

Reminders

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Am I Prepared to Die? – Addressing Mortality with Children

Objective

Will there be a sense of joy for you at your funeral....will people honestly say that there was a good life lived and that you are in a better place? How are you living today that demonstrates to your family and friends that you really believe your heavenly place is a better one? The reality of death is often a "discussion avoided" with children. How can you best establish a healthy awareness of the mortality we all face?

Bible Readings

1. John - Chapter 14 1-8

2. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.

Where (I) am going you know the way."

Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us."

3. Isaiah 57 1-2

The just man perishes, but no one takes it to heart; Devout men are swept away, with no one giving it a thought. Though he is taken away from the presence of evil, the just man

enters into peace; There is rest on his couch for the sincere, straightforward man.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1014

The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death. In the ancient litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: "From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord";⁵⁸⁸ to ask the Mother of God to intercede for us "at the hour of our death" in the Hail Mary; and to entrust ourselves to St. Joseph, the patron of a happy death.

Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. Death would have no great terrors for you if you had a quiet conscience. . . . Then why not keep clear of sin instead of running away from death? If you aren't fit to face death today, it's very unlikely you will be tomorrow. . . .⁵⁸⁹

Praised are you, my Lord, for our sister bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.

Woe on those who will die in mortal sin!

Blessed are they who will be found

in your most holy will,

for the second death will not harm them

2. Paragraph 989

We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives for ever, so after death the righteous will live for ever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day.⁵³⁴ Our resurrection, like his own, will be the work of the Most Holy Trinity:

Am I Prepared to Die? – Addressing Mortality with Children

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you

Small Group Questions

1. Who was the last person you knew that you feel was prepared to die?
2. What are you doing to let your family and friends know that your spiritual affairs are in order?

Recommended Resources

1. Catholic Culture Insights – Preparing for Heaven

<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=1182>

The topic of death, preparing for it, discussing it openly in the family is usually considered "taboo" in our times. But as Catholics, we have to remember that our time on earth is ONLY preparation for heaven. The author Therese Mueller gives examples on how to have fruitful discussions on preparation for death with family members.

Reminders

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Dealing With Your Emotions

Objective

Are we in control of our emotions - or are our emotions in control of us? Which one of our emotions has the greatest grip on us? Do we ever consider the emotional state of those around us? Emotions can drive the most satisfying and the most tragic life experiences. They are part of our "human-ness," but how do we use them as a vehicle to build up and not tear down?

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 4:32-33, The Christian's Walk

All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ

2. John 14:1-4, Jesus Comforts His Disciples

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.

3. Matthew 5: 22-23; 48

But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar and be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1762-177

The passions are the feelings, the emotions....of the natural components of human psychology which incline a person to act or not to act in view of what is perceived as good or evil. The principle passions are love and hatred, desire and fear, joy, sadness, and anger....They are good when they contribute to a good action and they are evil in the opposite case. They can be taken up into the virtues or perverted by the vices.

Small Group Questions

1. Are you managing your emotions or are they managing you?
2. How does the level or type of our emotions change when around different people? Our spouse? Our children? Our friends?
3. How are your emotional responses influenced by pop-culture? Do you inhibit softer emotions to maintain a "macho" façade?
4. Who do you know that handles emotions well?

Recommended Resources

1. What does the Bible say about feelings?

What does the Bible say about feelings? Jesus cares about your emotional state. The Bible has many passages that deal with emotions and are able to help you face them and be healed from the hurts of life.

Click on the feeling below to bring up lessons we are able to learn from the Bible and the Bible passages which talk about the feeling.

- [Abandoned & Overwhelmed](#)
- [Acceptance & Overcoming Rejection](#)
- [Anger](#)
- [Discouragement & Abandonment](#)
- [Fear](#)
- [Guilt & Shame](#)
- [Grief & Sorrow](#)
- [Loneliness](#)

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. Practical advice on dealing with your emotions

Don't make major decisions when you are under a lot of emotional stress. Take time to deal with the pressing matters. As time passes it will become easier to face the more difficult decisions.

Don't make major decisions when you are physically tired. Your emotions may get in the way of making the best decision.

When praying for God to heal your emotions bring them to the cross that held Jesus. In Isaiah 53:4-6 we read that Jesus took our sorrows on Himself when He died on the cross. "Lord I nail my anger to your cross" may be a prayer you pray while dealing with the hurts from anger in your life.

Forgiveness is key in a breakthrough with your emotions. Unforgiveness leads to bitterness and gives Satan a foothold in your life. As well unforgiveness leads to health problems. Placing the pain on Jesus releases it from your life. He took our pain when He went to the cross for us. "Lord I forgive Jacob for hurting me when He gossiped about me" is a prayer you may use. Exchange the name and event for the situation you are facing. The Lord will deal justly with the other person. You are responsible for your actions and you are able to forgive the person from hurting you. Without forgiving the person who hurt you will damage your relationship with the Lord. Remember the purpose of Jesus in your life. He is your Saviour and He is able to bring you through times like these. Forgiveness is the key that would allow the relationship to be restored.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding over the situation you are facing. His wisdom and insight will change your perspective on the situation. Understand that at times there is more than meets the eye going on in the person who may have hurt you. Situations in the present trip undealt with issues from the past off. We haven't fully dealt with something until we have been to the cross.

Our emotions are able to warn us that we are in danger.

Family Relationships

Objective

“Family” stretches beyond your wife and children. It includes parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and extends to all in-laws. Each is part of your family. Sometimes these are difficult relationships to maintain and conflicts are inevitable. What is our mission as fathers to nurture, lead, and be the role model in family relationships? Each man should leave the meeting looking to implement one or two ideas that will better relationships in his family. We should commit to being a good Christian leader at family gatherings, heeling conflicts that will no doubt arise, and work to have all family members share in the love that can exist in a family.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Timothy 5:1-8:

1Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

3Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. 4But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. 5The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. 6But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. 8If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2214

The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood; this is the foundation of the honor owed to parents. The respect of children, whether minors or adults, for their father and mother is nourished by the natural affection born of the bond uniting them. It is required by God's commandment.

2. Paragraph 2215

Respect for parents (filial piety) derives from gratitude toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom, and grace. "With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?"

3. Paragraph 2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a privileged community called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."

4. Paragraph 2208

The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Small Group Questions

1. When have you taken the lead to ensure family conflicts are not inflamed? When have you made them worse?
2. When is it best to step in to mediate family problems and when is it better to let conflicts run their course?

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. No One's Family Is Normal

<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthy-living/relationships/friends-family/inlaws-extended-family/normal-family>

No One's Family Is Normal

Date updated: May 07, 2007

By Allison Stacy

Content provided by Revolution Health Group

My cousin Monica and I have a saying: We're the "nontraditional" members of our family. Unlike other kin, we didn't run off and elope at 16, skim funds from the cash register at work or have babies during our teenage years. We don't hide in the basement during family gatherings or leave 47 consecutive rambling messages on our relatives' answering machines. Which just goes to show — when it comes to families, "normal" is a relative term.

The truth is every clan has its quirks. Some, of course, are harder to deal with than others (I, for one, lose my patience by the 23rd voice message). So how do you get past your family's idiosyncrasies and build healthier relationships with your relations? Try these five tactics.

Normalize your expectations

Whether you're a teenager mortified by your dad's falsetto crooning of disco hits or a grownup grappling with the overbearing aunt who still treats you like a 15-year-old, you've likely found yourself wishing you belonged to a nice, regular family.

Cheryl Dellasega, Ph.D., a professor of humanities and women's studies at Pennsylvania State University and author of the forthcoming *Forced to Be Family* (Wiley, 2007), says that's your first mistake. "Abnormal is the new normal," she says.

Your road to better relationships begins with the realization that sure, maybe your family's messed up — but so is everyone else's. As Leonard Felder, Ph.D., author of *When Difficult Relatives Happen to Good People: Surviving Your Family and Keeping Your Sanity* (Rodale, 2005) explains, mixed feelings, resentments and emotional baggage are all typical issues in families.

"Once you realize you're not alone in having some difficult family issues, you can stop wasting time wishing you were the Brady Bunch," he says.

Accept your lot

Next, realize your relatives are who they are — and their idiosyncrasies aren't a conspiracy to make your life miserable. New York psychologist Karen Sherman, Ph.D., co-author of *Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, Make It Last* (Authorhouse, 2004), says to remember nobody's perfect: "People's imperfections come out of their limitations. Have compassion."

Dellasega advises managing your expectations. "We expect so much of our families: They should always be there to support us, never question our behavior and welcome everyone connected to us. That's a pretty big request," she says. "Figuring out what you really need and want from the relationship, then trying to make it happen, leads to acceptance."

For example, try writing down five expectations for each relative — then cross off three from each list and focus on the remaining two items. "Maybe you can put up with your mother-in-law's well-intended toilet-training advice if she's a reliable babysitter," Dellasega says.

Social psychologist Susan Newman, Ph.D., author of *The Book of No* (McGraw-Hill, 2005), agrees: "You need to focus on the positive, not dwell on the things that drive you crazy. Acceptance takes the friction away."

Practice proven coping techniques

OK, so you can't pick your relatives, and you can't change them, either. But you can change your own responses to behavior that drives you berserk — which can change the whole dynamic.

"Most people can write the script of the fight before it happens," says marriage and family therapist Karen Gail Lewis, Ed.D., author of *With or Without a Man: Single Women Taking Control of Their Lives* (Bull Publishing, 2001). That means you have the power to revise it: "You can not respond, respond in a different way, change the subject or be humorous about it. You're prepared."

How should you alter your script? Newman suggests these four strategies for dealing with relatives who drive you nuts: Stay away as much as possible - Be with them in groups - When they hit a hot button, refuse to discuss the issue - Ask another relative to bail you out.

Felder also advocates alliance-building. "Find at least one other family member you talk to ahead of a family event to say, 'Let's back each other up at this next gathering, either by making eye contact or by speaking up when the other person is getting slimed.'"

Whatever you do, don't invite the behavior that bothers you, says Sherman: "The more you pick up the rope, the more you fuel that situation."

Avoid embarrassment

Dad may initiate his public displays of tone deafness without encouragement. So what's the best way to react to your relatives' humiliating behavior? You can ask your kin — especially a parent or someone you're close with — to stop: They often don't realize they're embarrassing you, says Newman, and if you politely request they don't do it, most will respect that.

Of course, Dad might be the type who, knowing you're ashamed, will just sing louder. If that's the case, Lewis says not to egg him on: "The less you say, the better." Either way, "Tell yourself, 'It's not a reflection on me,'" she says. "If you can walk away, do."

Help yourself through humor

How many times have you thought, "If I weren't laughing, I'd be crying"? When my family's at its craziest — from my aunt's free-associating phone conversations to more serious mental health issues — comic relief can seem like my only ticket out of the funny farm. But is it healthy to make fun of your family? "Absolutely," says Sherman. Humor helps you detach from emotion and maintain objectivity.

"I encourage creative game playing," she says. "Our family would set up a pool: 'How many times will Aunt Susie say so and so?' " Just don't let amusement turn into derision. "It's not healthy to ridicule your family or use sarcasm, because these are forms of aggression that hurt another person's feelings," Dellasega says. Instead, follow Felder's advice: "Silent humor is a great tension release that helps you feel adult and powerful, rather than trapped and powerless," he says. "For example, at a family dinner where people are getting on your nerves, you might say silently, 'Isn't it wonderful that we don't do this too often?'"

Love Thy Neighbor

Objective

At a time when we rarely see neighbors or we think of them as nuisances can we possibly love our neighbors? What does “love thy neighbor” really mean today? After the meeting everyone should feel appreciation for the people they are surrounded by, even the ones they aren’t close to. Find an opportunity to reach out and act to show love for the people around you, even if you don’t know them.

Bible Readings

1. Luke 10-27-37:

27He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b]" 28"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two silver coins[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2220

Beginning with the Old Testament, all kinds of juridical measures (the jubilee year of forgiveness of debts, prohibition of loans at interest and the keeping of collateral, the obligation to tithe, the daily payment of the day-laborer, the right to glean vines and fields) answer the exhortation of Deuteronomy: "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in the land.'" Jesus makes these words his own: "The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." In so doing he does not soften the vehemence of former oracles against "buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals . . .," but invites us to recognize his own presence in the poor who are his brethren:

When her mother reproached her for caring for the poor and the sick at home, St. Rose of Lima said to her: "When we serve the poor and the sick, we serve Jesus."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you know your “neighbors”? Are you aware of the people around you who are hurting?
2. Tell us about the last time you received a “Random Act of Kindness”. How did you feel?
3. How do you teach your children about caring for others around them?

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time

Love Thy Neighbor

5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

1. How To Love Your Neighbor by David Delk
<http://www.maninthemirror.org/alm/alm12.htm>

We all know people with stories like these:

Even though Tom and John work together, they have not said a civil word to each other for over two years.

Susan and her family no longer have any contact with her parents or siblings because of a feud that began over which restaurant to go to for Christmas dinner.

Bob has worked 70 hours a week for the last ten years, so his wife Sally has taken the kids and left. She says she just doesn't love him anymore.

We live in a world of broken relationships. Adam and Eve's sin had two primary results: broken relationships between men and God, and broken relationships with one another. In a sense, the whole message of the Bible is the story of God restoring our relationship with Him and our relationships with other people.

When God created Adam, He made him in His image. A part of God's "image" is the fact that He is a trinity -- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in an eternal love relationship with one another. I believe this is why God says it was not good for Adam to be alone -- he could not fully reflect the image of God unless he had relationships with others.

Paul brings out the same truth when he develops the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-16). Each individual in the church is to develop deep relationships with other members so that the body can grow and "build itself up in love" (Eph. 4:16). To be mature Christians who reflect God's image, we need vital relationships with others.

When the lawyer answered Jesus's question about the key to eternal life (Luke 10:25), he addressed both effects of the fall in what is known as the Great Commandment. "And he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). The first part of his answer deals with our separation from God, the second, our separation from one another.

In response to the lawyer's query about who is a neighbor, Jesus sets forth a standard of sacrificial love by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, Jesus provides a living example of the kind of love that restores relationships between men.

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE

1. Love feels compassion.

Unlike the priest and Levite, when the Samaritan saw the hurting man, "he took pity on him" (Lk. 10:33).

Jesus shows compassion for the people of Jerusalem, and us as well, when he says that he "longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Lk. 13:34).

My own tendency is to only love when the need is so obvious that it is the equivalent of driving up on a ten car pile-up. But Christ calls me to open my eyes and see the needs of the people around me. Are you aware of the hurting people around you? Who at your office is suffering? What about people in your church? How about your spouse and children? Love notices and enters into the suffering of others.

How can we grow in compassion? By prayerfully considering the great love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. We were broken and bleeding beside the road, left for dead. But Jesus came along, picked us up, bandaged our wounds, and healed us. If we build into our schedule a time to remember what Christ has done for us, we will grow in our compassion for others.

2. Love is intentional.

In the parable, the Good Samaritan carries out a "plan" to help the hurting man - he goes to him, bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey, and takes him to an inn (Lk. 10:34-35). Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" who is remaking us in His image.

True love has a goal in mind -- the healing, redemption, and transformation of the one being loved. This means that we need to be proactive in our love, actively seeking ways to meet the needs of the people God brings into our lives.

Perhaps you need to schedule "dates" with your spouse and children. It may mean making a point to find out the needs of an elderly neighbor, or the single mother across the street. Love doesn't just happen -- it requires energy, passion, and a strong sense of purpose.

3. Love denies self. Jesus intended for us to realize that the Samaritan would not have been just strolling down this road. This was the road to and from Jerusalem, so the Samaritan was on a journey and probably had places to go. In order to meet the needs of the hurting man, he had to lay aside his own schedule and interests. If we are to love, we must change from a focus on ourselves (schedule, plans, dreams, etc.) to a focus on others.

Jesus illustrates this in his willingness to become incarnate and give his life for men. He "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8). Like Christ, we must consider others as more important than ourselves.

4. Love acts. Consider the contrast between the priest and Levite on the one hand and the Samaritan on the other. Jesus doesn't say whether the priest and Levite had good intentions, he only tells us that they didn't do anything to help the man. In contrast, the Samaritan acted to meet the real needs of the hurting man.

In the midst of our broken world, good intentions don't count for much. When we see the devastation that sin has wrought in the lives of people around us, we must go beyond good intentions - we must act.

When I was in college, the bathroom stalls often contained "interesting" reading material. However, one statement that I found there rings true -- "Love is a Verb." For every hundred people that think or talk about doing something, only one will do it. It is not enough to just feel compassion for someone else, true love takes action to meet their needs.

5. Love gives.

In the parable, the Samaritan gives of both his time and money to help the man. Jesus knew that it would cost something if we choose to love others.

As a matter of fact, it cost Jesus everything to love us. In the last supper, Jesus taught his disciples that he was giving his body and blood - the essence of his physical life for them, and for us (Lk. 22:19, 20).

Tom has been visiting a young mother who is dying of AIDS. Recently, she told him the one thing she wanted was a dresser to put her clothes in. He told her he would pray about it and see what he could do. Tom asked around to find someone who might want to donate a dresser. But as Tom prayed, he became convicted by the Holy Spirit. "It was as if God was saying to me, 'Here you have all the things you ever need, and you won't even buy this woman a dresser.'" Three days later, they went together to a nice used furniture store and bought a dresser for her bedroom.

APPLICATION

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). If we know Christ and his love for us, we must love the people around us. Fill in four boxes of the following chart with specific things you can do this week.

Consider keeping it handy to review your progress at the end of the week.

Example: pray for each morning and evening

Example: Speak to your neighbor the next time he is in his yard

CONCLUSION

God has made you for fellowship with others it is part of the very essence of who you are as His image. Without deep relationships with other people, you will never find the lasting satisfaction that your heart desires.

One of the things that Christ came to do was to restore relationships between people. Love is the key to that task. Yet, too often, we are like the priest and Levite, living "religious" lives that are empty of love. We need to reflect daily on Christ's love for us. Then we will reach out in love to those around us. The pleasures of this life satisfy for a moment, but the rewards of giving ourselves in love last for eternity.

Living Relationship With God

Objective

Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion? How do you put your relationship with your God in its proper place? We as reasoning beings are always questioning and in need of renewing. What is unique becomes ordinary. How do you inject vitality in your most important relationship....the one with your creator?

Bible Readings

1. Isaiah Chapter 43 11-13

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.

When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.

2. Acts 10:39-41

We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and (in) Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

This man God raised (on) the third day and granted that he be visible,

not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2780 - 2782

We can invoke God as "Father" because he is revealed to us by his Son become man and because his Spirit makes him known to us. The personal relation of the Son to the Father is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see: and yet, the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God.³²

When we pray to the Father, we are in communion with him and with his Son, Jesus Christ.³³ Then we know and recognize him with an ever new sense of wonder. The first phrase of the Our Father is a blessing of adoration before it is a supplication. For it is the glory of God that we should recognize him as "Father," the true God. We give him thanks for having revealed his name to us, for the gift of believing in it, and for the indwelling of his Presence in us.

We can adore the Father because he has caused us to be reborn to his life by adopting us as his children in his only Son: by Baptism, he incorporates us into the Body of his Christ; through the anointing of his Spirit who flows from the head to the members, he makes us other "Christs."

Small Group Questions

1. What habits do you have in your daily life or at certain times of the year that put you in a position to have a living relationship with God.
2. Aside from births, deaths, and sacraments, when do you feel closest to God?

Recommended Resources

1. God Stories
http://www.stjohnrcia.com/journey/jof_god.asp

We all have an image of God, whether we are conscious of it or not. Usually that image comes from our parents, teachers, and from experiences that we had as a child. When we are young we form our image of the world, of whether it is a positive or negative place, and along with it we form our understanding of God, of whether God is a kind and loving God or a fearful punishing God.

As we grow, our understanding of God must also grow. As adults we are challenged to move beyond the understanding of God that we had as a child and to a fuller, more mature understanding. God is beyond all human words and concepts, so no human being can fully understand the mystery of God, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't strive to grow in our understanding. As in any relationship, our relationship with God is an ongoing, dynamic relationship, which grows and changes throughout our lives. Just as we continually learn more about our friend as the friendship develops, we continue to learn more about God as our relationship with God develops.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

How Do You Make Your Spouse Feel Appreciated?

Objective

A majority of the problems that occur in a marriage can be attributed to the fact that one or both partners feels unappreciated. Boredom with the relationship, jealousy, nagging and a general sense of discontent are the common marriage relationship problems that find their roots in a sense of not being appreciated. The goal as a Husband is to realize this, then take action as the best way to improve your marriage relationship can be "in the doing" that let's your wife know she is appreciated by you.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:25-30

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

2. 1 Peter 3:7

Likewise, you husbands should live with your wives in understanding, showing honor to the weaker female sex, since we are joint heirs of the gift of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. 2 - "Husbands who do not respect their wives will have as little success in prayer as those who, according to Paul, have no love: their prayers will be "a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1).

3. Colossians 3:19

Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them.

4. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

The husband should fulfill his duty toward his wife, and likewise the wife toward her husband. A wife does not have authority over her own body, but rather her husband, and similarly a husband does not have authority over his own body, but rather his wife. Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent for a time, to be free for prayer, but then return to one another, so that Satan may not tempt you through your lack of self-control.

Small Group Questions

1. Which spouse feels more unappreciated in your marriage, your wife or you? Why?
2. What are the roots causes that may cause your wife to feel unappreciated by you?
3. What will you be doing in the next week to show your wife she is appreciated by you as her husband?

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting

How Do You Make Your Spouse Feel Appreciated?

4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

1. The 5 Step Secret to making your wife Feel Appreciated

Step 1 Understanding: Although you cannot make anyone 100% happy, you can do your part in making your wife feel special and appreciated. The wife (like the husband) has a unique and key role in the marital partnership. If she feels abandoned, neglected, or otherwise unappreciated it will be difficult for her to maintain that positive ambiance.

Step 2 Show Direct Appreciation: Women need the small things that may be easily overlooked. A phone call in the middle of the day for no reason; fresh flower arrangements; date night; unexpected tokens of affection, etc. Keep note of her interests and use them to personalize your surprises i.e. if she's dieting do not get her chocolates.

Step 3 Acknowledgement: You may not understand her emotional needs but you definitely need to acknowledge them. Take the time to actively listen to her. Be the initiator of conversations. Be nonjudgmental with your opinions.

Step 4 Pick your Battles: Let the small things pass. Arguing or a domineering attitude will only fester and eventually poison the love you share. If it irritates you that she isn't the best housekeeper, try to hire help or help clean up when you have time. Remember that you are not perfect either. Was it her laugh you fell in love with or her clean kitchen?

Step 5 Tell her you love her everyday. Tell others you love her. Hearing it and saying it will keep the love alive. Love is a chain reaction. The more love you give the more love you receive.

2. Other ideas to show direct Appreciation to your wife:

Acts of service.

Doing something special for your wife is an easy and free way to show your appreciation. A foot rub after a long day of work would be greatly appreciated. Use some scented lotion for a bit of aromatherapy as well. Clean the house! Coming home to a messy house can be very stressful. If you are home during the day on a weekend, keeping the house clean shows your appreciation for the hard work your wife does.

Making your spouse's favorite meal or dessert on an ordinary day is a terrific way to make her feel special, especially if you don't make it very often. Or make something new for dinner to try together; the same old things can get boring after a while.

Whatever your spouse's job around the house is, give her a day off. Who wouldn't feel special and enjoy not having to do a chore? Folding the laundry, doing the dishes for once and let your spouse enjoy a little well-deserved rest.

Offer a massage. Don't do it because you want one in return. Don't wait until your wife asks. Just offer one to show that you really enjoy the act of touching the person that you're in a love with.

Treats and Surprises.

A simple and inexpensive way to surprise your wife with a treat is to pick up her favorite treats at the grocery store. Then you can sneak them into a her purse or computer bag for your wife to find and enjoy at work or out running errands. Or leave a treat on the pillow or nightstand, or in a coat pocket.

Leave your spouse alone to do a hobby, with no strings attached. She is probably tired of hearing you complain when she is watching TV while the laundry is not done. Let her have a night off to do her own thing, and don't be looking over her shoulder. Or your wife might enjoy a night out

Show your appreciation.

If your spouse works hard at a job, thank her for working hard for you and your family. A simple thank you can mean a lot. Send an "I love you" text message, or leave a message on your spouse's voicemail. If your spouse travels out of town on business, write love notes and hide them in the luggage. Put one in her purse, in reading materials, tucked in a shoe etc. You could even have the kids write notes, or draw pictures so your wife will know how much she will be missed by you and your family. Hiding love notes around the house works just as well.

Say thank you.

It turns out that it's the little things that count. Mom and Dad probably taught you that you're supposed to say thanks when someone does something nice for you but you may have picked up their bad habits of failing to say it to one another. Don't take anything that your wife does for you for granted.

Create an appreciation scrapbook.

Take the time to sit down and put together a list of all of the things that you appreciate about your wife. Go through magazines and find images that go along with each item. Use these images to create pages for a scrapbook that depicts the things that you appreciate. Your wife will appreciate this gift for a long time.

Try to notice the small things.

The small haircut that she got on the way home from the store or the new seasoning that was used on a meal are all really small things but noticing them goes a long way towards making your wife feel like you're actually paying attention and appreciating what you've got.

Do things that your wife likes.

When figuring out what you want to do over the weekend, consider trying things that you don't love but you know your wife really enjoys. It won't kill you to sit through a chick flick and it will make your wife feel appreciated.

The Husband does not feel appreciated by his wife.

In some cases, the husband may often wish that his wife would do things to show us that we are appreciated. Try to think in the reverse instead; make an effort to show your wife that you're appreciative of the marriage. This will improve things drastically and probably produce the results that you as a husband are looking for.

Living God's Will In Everyday Life

Objective

When do you – you live God's Will? 20% of the time, 60% of the time, 80% of the time, 100% of the time? Do you do it when you feel like, when it fits you best, when it is convenient....are you selective? The ultimate goal of a Christian should be to live God's Will. Why is it so hard? In this lesson you will learn what it means to do God's will and the benefits.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew Chapter 7 Verse 21
Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.
2. Matthew Chapter 12 Verse 50
For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother.
3. Romans Chapter 12 Verse 2
Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1785-1786
Moral Conscience – Article 6 Part II. The Formation of Conscience
1785 In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.
Moral Conscience – Article 6 Part III To Choose in Accord with Conscience
1786 Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult. But he must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law.
2. Paragraph 1954
Man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good. The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie:
The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin...But this command of human reason would not have the force of law if it were not the voice and interpreter of a higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be submitted.

Small Group Questions

1. Think about a situation you have been in lately where you did not live God's will. Discuss that situation and what caused you to make the choice you made.
2. What action can you take the next time so the outcome is different?
3. At this point in your life what level of commitment do you have to living God's will and not your will? Discuss ways you can improve upon making the right choice.

Reminders

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2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

God & Family

Objective

To discover a way as a family to bring God into your life more and deepen your relationship with God as a family. How often do you pray with your family? How often do you discuss God with your family?
God is family!

Bible Readings

1. Proverbs Chapter 1 Verse 8
Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching.
2. Daniel Chapter 13 Verse 4
Her pious parents had trained their daughter according to the law of Moses.
3. Ephesians Chapter 6 Verse 4
Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 5
"Catechesis is an education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life."

Small Group Questions

1. Discuss what you are doing as a family now and share that with your fellow fathers.
 - a. Use what you learned as a catalyst to do something different with your family.
 - b. Plan a family event that centers around God
 - i. Soup Kitchen
 - ii. Visiting someone homebound.
 - iii. Pick a charity and do a group project
2. What can you do to involve all your family members?
3. Discuss with your group where you think you will have difficulties bringing your family closer to God.
4. What past family experiences have you had with your family that you can learn and grow from?

Reminders

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2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
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Who Is God For Me?

Objective

The Divine is so great, so wondrous, and so unfathomable that any image or metaphor we use to try to understand or describe God is at best, only a partial fit. What is my personal vision of God? How do I understand the depth and breadth of His being?

Bible Readings

1. Isaiah Chapter 43: 11-13

It is I, I the LORD; there is no savior but me.

It is I who foretold, I who saved; I made it known, not any strange god among you; You are my witnesses, says the LORD. I am God,

Yes, from eternity I am He; There is none who can deliver from my hand: who can countermand what I do?

2. II Corinthians Chapter 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 355-358

355 "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." 218 Man occupies a unique place in creation: (I) he is "in the image of God"; (II) in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds; (III) he is created "male and female"; (IV) God established him in his friendship.

356 Of all visible creatures only man is "able to know and love his creator" He is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake", and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:

What made you establish man in so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself! You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being capable of tasting your eternal Good.

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

358 God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him:

What is it that is about to be created, that enjoys such honor? It is man that great and wonderful living creature, more precious in the eyes of God than all other creatures! For him the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the rest of creation exist. God attached so much importance to his salvation that he did not spare his own Son for the sake of man. Nor does he ever cease to work, trying every possible means, until he has raised man up to himself and made him sit at his right hand.

Small Group Questions

1. Who is God for you? Is it the image of the eternal father? Is it Christ in the Eucharist? Is it the spirit of God among us? Who is god for you?

2. What do you do to share with your family and other an understanding of who God is for you....when does it enter your conversation?

Recommended Resources

1. The Nature and Attributes of God

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06612a.htm>

I. As Known Through Natural Reason

- A. Infinity of God
- B. Unity or Unicity of God
- C. Simplicity of God
- D. Divine Personality

II. As Known Through Faith

- A. Eternity
- B. Immensity and Ubiquity, or Omnipresence
- C. Immutability
- D. The Divine Attributes
 1. Divine Knowledge
 2. The Divine Will
 3. Intellect and Will (Providence, Predestination, and Reprobation)List of Ministries at

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

How Does My Childhood Relationship With My Father Affect My Parenting?

Objective

The purpose of this topic is to examine ways in which our own fathers influenced us positively or negatively. We should try to emulate the positive things we learned from our father and rework or eliminate the negative influences.

Bible Readings

1. Deuteronomy 5:16
Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and prosperity in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you.
2. John 9:3-5 ESV
Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. (4) We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. (5) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
3. Deuteronomy 11:19 ESV
You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.
4. Colossians 3:20 ESV
Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2247
"Honor your father and your mother"
2. Paragraph 2222
Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.

Small Group Questions

1. What are the memorable milestones that you have created with your children that they'll look back on with fondness and joy?
2. How are you reapplying the fond memories from your father-son relationship with your children?
3. What are the dark memories of your father and how are you motivating yourself not to pass these examples on to your children?

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. All Pro Dad.com – Dealing with Father Memories

<http://www.allprodad.com>

On the day David's son turned twenty-two, David was uneasy and distracted. You see, he was twenty-two when his own father died. Now all those emotions were coming back, along with a sense that he was in uncharted waters. He later told me, "I suddenly realized that I no longer knew how to father. I didn't have a model for fathering a 22-year-old son."

It's a common reaction. When our children reach the same age we were during significant events in our lives, often the memories and emotions coming flooding back in. When they get their driver's license, you recall getting yours. When they graduate, you can almost feel your own cap and gown from 25 years ago. This phenomenon seems especially apparent when linked with father-son memories.

Maybe your dad helped you with your pitching motion when you were twelve, or spent hours working with you on a seventh grade science project. As your child faces similar challenges at a similar age, use your father's example to inspire you.

But, we also need to be ready for the dark memories. If your father left your family when he was forty-two, watch out when you reach that age. Be careful not to use your father as an excuse to take the easy way out of your commitments.

So what do we do with all these feelings? If your father was a positive influence, use your memories to honor him. Share your memories over the phone, in a letter, or in person and tell him, "Thanks."

If your father caused you mostly pain, then be ready to face the facts head-on; claim ownership of how you feel, and don't deny his profound impact on you.

Better yet, use your father's shortcomings to motivate yourself as a father. If you missed some hugs or never heard the words "I love you," don't make your children pay for your deficit. Make a firm commitment that says, "It stops here. I refuse to pass these cycles on to my children."

Seek regularly to give your children memorable milestones that they'll look back on with fondness and joy - and then share with their own children.

Unselfishness - How To Teach It

Objective

In our increasingly narcissistic society it is a challenge to teach our kids to be empathetic. Do not expect your children to naturally always think of others first or know how to be empathetic to those who are suffering. We need to teach them how and lead by example.

Bible Readings

1. Cor 10:24

24 Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

2. Cor 10:33

33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 713

The Messiah's characteristics are revealed above all in the "Servant songs."

Small Group Questions

1. How do you as the Father, role model empathy, tolerance, and brotherhood to your children?
2. When was the last time you heaped praise on your children for doing a "random act of kindness"?
3. Do your children know what "Pay it Forward" means, when was the last time you role modeled it with your children present?

Included Resources

1. Teaching Your Children Values, Linda and Richard Eyre. The authors give the following guidelines in developing these traits and character values in your children

<http://www.valuesparenting.com/about/theeyres.php>

Heap Praise: If you notice your child doing something unselfish, heap praise on them to reward them. Let them know that what they are doing is a good thing.

Give Responsibility: A Harvard study showed a correlation between the amount of responsibility children have and their tendency to think of others. The Eyre's caution that a child with no responsibility may become spoiled and begin to lose his sense of caring and concern.

Teach by Example: Show children this attitude of empathy in your own actions, by modeling the same behavior and values you want to instill in them. Actively listen to your children by hearing what they have to say, then paraphrasing it back to them so they know you understood it and are concerned with their thoughts and feelings.

Say, "I'm Sorry": If you have made a mistake or were insensitive to your child, let your child know you are sorry for this.

Share Your Feelings: If your children say or do something that hurts your feelings, let them know. And if your children do something good and helpful, let them know that too.

Remember the Process

According to the authors, becoming unselfish is a process that "takes thinking and practicing and a certain amount of maturity to develop." Do not expect your children to naturally always think of others first or know how to be empathetic to those who are suffering. It is a character virtue that you as a mother must help them learn.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
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Raising Children In The Digital Age

Objective

Present ways to help us as fathers to keep our children safe in the digital age. This includes the internet and cell phones. Not only safe from predators but also from cyber-bullying and inappropriate use of technology like sharing photos, 'sexting', etc.

Bible Readings

1. Deuteronomy 4:9-10

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."

2. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Verse

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2489

2. Paragraph 2492

Additional Information

Kids can be awfully hard to keep up with these days, as technology that seems to grow faster and faster gets marketed to children who are younger and younger. Although there are lots of websites designed for children that are fun, educational, and interactive, there are also more and more communication tools such as instant messaging (IMing), chat rooms, and social networking (Facebook, MySpace) that make it easy for kids to come in contact with unsuitable material or worse, to talk to strangers who could be sexual predators.

Cell phones can seem just as hard to keep up with. Today, they are more than just portable phone lines that allow kids to call for a ride after school or dial 911 in an emergency; many new phones have standard gadgets like text messaging, cameras, and Internet capabilities that make it easier for kids to get into trouble by using them inappropriately.

Small Group Questions

1. What do you do to keep your kids safe online and on the cell phone?
 - a. Parental control software
 - b. Keep computers in a "public" area of the house
 - c. Limit usage
 - d. Monitor text messaging

Recommended Resources

1. www.safekids.com
2. online safety quiz for preteens
<http://www.safekids.com/quiz/q1.htm>

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. What Parents Can Do
<http://www.ou.edu/oupd/kidtool.htm#parents>

Learn about the Internet

If you are just starting out, see what your local library, community center, school or newspaper offers by way of introduction.

Get Involved

Spend time online with your child, whether at home, at the library, or at a computer center in your community. Your involvement in your child's life, including his or her online life, is the best insurance you can have of your child's safety.

Stay Informed

Keep yourself informed about the parental control tools that can help you keep your child safe online. This brochure includes an introduction to what currently available tools can and cannot do.

Become an Advocate for Kids

If you see material or practices you do or do not like, contact your Internet Service Provider (the company that provides you with a connection to the Internet) or the company that created the material. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to make sure that this growing medium develops in positive ways for kids.

No Regrets - 10 Ways To Make Time For Your Children

Objective

Help the Fathers to understand “How to Live a life of no regrets with your family” by learning how to spend more time with their children and family.

It is suggested for the presenting small group, to focus the larger group time by sharing your team’s personal experiences/examples on how you each have changed your life in some way to spend more time with family and your children, in order to “live a life of no regrets.”

Bible Readings

1. Psalm 112

“His children will be mighty in the land”

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones."

Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod. . . . He who disciplines his son will profit by him.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Small Group Questions

1. Do you regularly come home on time from work to your family and children?
2. Are your children’s birthdays, recitals, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar?
3. Do you schedule breakfast dates with your daughter/son?

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. Robert Rogers Website
<http://www.mightyintheland.com>
 - a. 10 ways to make more time with your Children
 1. Sign-up for some organized activity together-chess club, a sports league, church groups, and so on as your free time activity That way, you can use the structure of the activity to help you spend time with your child..

2. Put birthdays, recitals, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar. Tell co-workers that you wouldn't miss those events for the world, and ask them to help remind you.
3. Create regular rituals to connect with your kids with phone calls from the office, special "daddy" time when you walk in the door, or other weekly events that keep you in touch.
4. Discuss your priorities with your boss. Be candid with him or her about times when you need to flex your schedule for family events. Make it clear that you are dedicated to doing your best at work, but that family is also very important to you. Suggest your own "win-win" solutions or ask for his ideas to help reach a workable balance.
5. Create a "Next Year's Vacation" planning session with your children by having them share with your pictures/places of where they want to go and how they want to spend time with Dad on vacation!
6. Create a family devotional time. This is a time set aside during a time where all members of the family are required to be there. Then you as a father take the lead in sharing important things with your family. Read passages in Holy Scripture and pray together; share thoughts on certain historical events (Memorial Day) and what they should mean to us; talk about current events; peer pressure the kids are facing or how to look forward to an uncertain future with confidence.
7. As the Father, make the weekend Saturday or Sunday breakfast and have your kids help out as appropriate. Talk as you all prepare the meal about what was their "favorite thing" that happened in their life during the week
8. Car Time. When traveling to the next sporting or activity event, instead of listening to the radio, try spending time with your kids by discussing with them: 1) What was the best part of today?; 2) What was your favorite thing that happened to you this week; 3) Tell me about something really cool that you saw today/this week?
9. Have a Breakfast time with Daddy with your children individually. No agenda's, just go out to breakfast and spend time with your child 1 on 1. Do you know their favorite song, favorite teacher, who they think is the coolest kid @ school, who are the coolest parents, etc?
10. Support your company's "Take your children to work day". If your company does not have it, consider starting one. Many Cincinnati based companies like P&G, Kroger, Macy's have established "Take your children to work" programs.

b. 10 TIPS TO BETTER FAMILY TIME

Parents and their children are spending less time interacting with each other. As a result, many children are getting less personal love and attention than their parents did. American Demographics reported that parents today spend roughly 40 percent less time with their children than did parents a generation ago. To help families stay connected, below is a list of helpful family time tips. Keep in mind, quantity and quality time is important when choosing activities. So build memories around exciting events by keeping your family time creative and enjoyable. Print out the following tips as daily reminders.

1 Eat together & listen to each other

Most children today don't know the meaning of a family dinnertime. Yet the communication and unity built during this set-ting is integral to a healthy family life. Sharing a meal together allows the opportunity to talk about each other's lives. This is a time for parents to listen, as well as to give advice and encouragement. Attentive listening conveys a message that a person is really interested in another. It also imparts a sense of worth and helps develop trust. Therefore, listening is a critical link in successful parenting

2 Read often

It's important for parents to read to their children. The latest research indicates that reading to your children cultivates an interest for knowledge and stimulates language development. It also increases their attention spans and helps them become more curious. Look for books that your child would enjoy reading. After reading, ask questions about the content.

3 Do chores together

Part of what goes on in the home is the development of teamwork. Functional family life depends on the contribution of everyone. Assigning chores is the most productive way of teaching responsibility and accountability to your children. Doing chores with your child will help foster good communication skills.

No Regrets - 10 Ways To Make Time For Your Children

4 Help with schoolwork

A great way to spend quality time with children and light a fire of learning is to help children with their schoolwork. A parent's eagerness to help will cause a child to become more interested in school thus improving his or her grades. Regular trips to the library for school projects are an inexpensive and enjoyable way to spend time with children. Helping should begin with an understanding that children are responsible for homework. Parents are there to help their child get organized and to encourage them when they get stuck.

5 Start a hobby or project

Choose a fun activity that your child is interested in. Activities like cooking, crafts, fishing or biking will make great hobbies that can open the door to exciting family time. Once a child learns a new recipe or is able to cast a lure accurately, let him or her take the lead with your supervision.

6 Play games

New technology has made video games more prevalent. As a result, many children are spending long hours in front of the TV playing computer programs. Parents should find creative ways to spark an interest in family-oriented contests such as board games or card games. This will give parents additional time to talk and nurture their relationship.

7 Plan a family outing

Sometimes getting out of the house is important. Hop in the family car and go for a drive. Prepare a picnic lunch and visit a local park. Take time to play catch or ride a bike. A stroll in the woods will help parents interact with their children. Also, a visit to the zoo or museum will spark a child's enthusiasm and lead to lengthy discussions.

8 Encourage athletic activities

It is vital for children to exercise. Sports not only strengthen the body, but also build character and determination. Whether it's a father pitching a baseball to a son or a mother and daughter nature walking, finding time for athletic events is important for a child's emotional and physical development. This is a great opportunity for a family to interact.

9 Create a Family Time calendar

Since many parents have hectic schedules, time with children often becomes a low priority whether intended or not. Post a calendar on the refrigerator and have parents and children pencil in special events. Knowing when you're going to meet may also help you think of creative activities. Commit to keeping this schedule free from interruptions.

10 Pray together & attend a house of worship

Nothing is more special than taking a few minutes each day to pray with a child before bedtime. By explaining the purpose behind prayer, children will learn the importance of faith as the foundation for the family. Also, when parents go to religious services, they instill in their children a reverence for God. Churches can also offer invaluable support to families.

Supporting Your Parish

Objective

Is your parish a place you look forward to visiting or just a place to go to Sunday mass?

The parish is our religious home base. A place where we feel welcome and in the presence of God and people who share our faith and views. How do we support this most important organization and all of the good it does in faith ministries, outreach, education? Are there ways we might not think about that we could make a difference in the parish or someone's life through our time, talents and treasure?

Last year we brought in Sean Ater of the Parish Formation office to talk a bit about the various ministries of the parish and where/how fathers might get involved. Perhaps invite Sean to join our meeting and speak to the group again

Bible Readings

1. 1 Esdras 1:4

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of the Persians, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremias might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of the Persians: and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and in writing also, saying: 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of the Persians: The Lord the God of heaven hath given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judea. 3 Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him. Let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judea, and build the house of the Lord the God of Israel: he is the God that is in Jerusalem. 4 And let all the rest in all places wheresoever they dwell, help him every man from his place. with silver and gold, and goods, and cattle, besides that which they offer freely to the temple of God, which is in Jerusalem. 5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Juda and Benjamin, and the priests, and Levites, and every one whose spirit God had raised up, to go up to build the temple of the Lord, which was in Jerusalem.

2. Exodus 22:21-30

21 Thou shalt not molest a stranger, nor afflict him: for yourselves also were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not hurt a widow or an orphan. 23 If you hurt them they will cry out to me, and I will hear their cry: 24 And my rage shall be enkindled, and I will strike you with the sword, and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. 25 If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor, that dwelleth with thee, thou shalt not be hard upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries.

26 If thou take of thy neighbour a garment in pledge, thou shalt give it him again before sunset. 27 For that same is the only thing wherewith he is covered, the clothing of his body, neither hath he any other to sleep in: if he cry to me, I will hear him, because I am compassionate. 28 Thou shalt not speak ill of the gods, and the prince of thy people thou shalt not curse. 29 Thou shalt not delay to pay thy tithes and thy firstfruits: thou shalt give the firstborn of thy sons to me. 30 Thou shalt do the same with the firstborn of thy oxen also and sheep: seven days let it be with its dam, the eighth day thou shalt give it to me.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2179

"A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop."¹¹⁵ It is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love:

You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.¹¹⁶

Additional Information

Last year Mitch West (of fathers team) organized donations to the local battered women's shelter. Get with Mitch and see what the group could organize to bring in donations. Last year it was as easy as bringing in sheets, towels, diapers.

There are always ideas of needs in the bulletin. Some relate to foodbank volunteering, collecting for a cause, etc. How can we contribute more in fathers team to make a difference in the parish and the community?

Small Group Questions

1. Talk in your small group about those in the group who are active in a ministry and why they do it, what they get out of it. Recall that even being the small team lead in Fathers Team is supporting a ministry of the parish.
2. How can you get involved with small steps in supporting the parish?
3. Help decorate church at holiday, help with setup for Batahola garage sale, perhaps a soup kitchen volunteer? These are good ways to get a start.
4. If you are active, is there something calling you further? Is there something new you can try, meet new people, and find new ways to be a part of the bigger picture?

Recommended Resources

1. List of Ministries at IHoM
<http://www.ihom.org/GETINVOLVED/Ministries/ListofMinistries/tabid/90/Default.aspx>
2. Do you donate blood? You can do it in the name of IHoM.
<http://www.hoxworth.org/>

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. Tithing and offering
<http://churchtithesandofferings.com/>

I. The Tithe, the Church, and the Storehouse

Instead of benefiting the needy, tithing is the main source of funds for building religious storehouse empires. The kingdom of heaven, which is the New Testament picture of the storehouse, has a limitless capacity, compared to the Old Testament storehouse, . The building in which we worship is not the Old Testament storehouse renewed for us in the New Testament. So, the new challenge today is to fill up the borderless gates of heaven.

As I was working in a church office a man stopped in and asked for some help to pay for his rent and groceries in order to take care of his children. I volunteered to help him. I took the man out, gave him some cash, and paid for some groceries. While on our trip around town, he began sharing his amazing testimony with me. He informed me that he stopped down the road to ask two other churches that had both built brand new, multi-million dollar facilities. Come to find out, he walked out without a cent. Expecting nothing from us, he showed up at the church facility I had been working at, which was run down, old, and smelly, but there God met his need. To make a long story short, I believe I was more blessed than he was by the end of the day.

I began to think of why the other churches could not give just a little bit from their tithe. Of course multi-million dollar facilities require much attention from our pocket. If they just asked themselves one question, "Was it worth it?" I do not boast, but through the power of God I was able to help this man and fellowship with him, when he needed it most. In the end the giver was blessed through his giving without tithing. Along with it, heaven's unlimited storehouse is collecting untold riches through God's ability in me. Yes, their pews might be filled, their tithe and offering plates might be full, but their storehouse is empty. And if I could write on their elaborate gold laden walls. . . MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN!

Supporting Your Pastor & Parish Priests

Objective

Can you believe that Priests get to take vacations? Doesn't that priest drive a nice car??

Have you ever heard a question like this about someone who works 7 days a week supporting the needs of the parish flock? Understanding the role and challenges of our Pastor and how we can better serve him in his service to us is the goal of this session. We had Father Tom come talk to the group last year about the challenges of being a new pastor in the parish. Perhaps this year we can 1) have Father Tom come back and speak to current challenges in the parish and how we can help; 2) invite our new priest Father Robert Hadden to come speak to us about his path to priesthood and how we can support his needs in a new parish and position.

Bible Readings

1. Hebrews 13:17
Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.
2. Romans 15:30
I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,
3. Colossians 4:2-4
Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.
4. 1 Timothy 5:17-18
Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1551
This priesthood is ministerial. "That office . . . which the Lord committed to the pastors of his people, is in the strict sense of the term a service." It is entirely related to Christ and to men. It depends entirely on Christ and on his unique priesthood; it has been instituted for the good of men and the communion of the Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a "sacred power" which is none other than that of Christ. The exercise of this authority must therefore be measured against the model of Christ, who by love made himself the least and the servant of all. "The Lord said clearly that concern for his flock was proof of love for him."

Small Group Questions

1. How do I show respect to my pastor and how do I convey that respect to my children and spouse.
2. If a parish priest or the pastor makes a mistake, do I chime in or do I look for understanding of his position?
3. What ways can we think of to lend support of our parish priests? Prayer? Fellowship?

Recommended Resources

1. 5 ways to support your parish priest handout:
This would be a great handout for the day's session!
http://www.osv.com/Portals/0/images/pdf/P950_Sample.pdf
2. 10 ways to support your parish priest:
<http://www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/20000501/ARTICLES/supportpriest.htm>

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

If you've been paying attention to this year's presidential campaign news, you've heard or read some of the opinions of Bob Jones University on Catholics. Those opinions may raise our blood pressure temporarily, but they don't hurt the way the same comments would coming from a friend or neighbor. Priests aren't any different. A particular news article may annoy a priest, but the words and actions of parishioners can hurt.

In his letters, the apostle Paul repeatedly encouraged Christian communities of the time to "let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith." (Galatians 6:10), and "be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." (Ephesians 4:32) Saint Paul never made any exceptions to his instructions on how Christians should treat each other. His instructions apply to everyone in Christian communities, from a parishioner who only shows up for Mass at Christmas to the pastor.

Most of us are not in a position to do much about media attitudes toward priests, but we can do something about the way our own parish priests are treated. Saint Paul tells us that "If one part suffers, all the parts suffers with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." (1Corinthians 12:26) These ten suggestions can increase the joy in our parishes.

1. Pray for your parish priests on a regular basis. Encourage others to do the same.
2. Tell your parish priests when you like something they do, or that you found a particular homily helpful.
3. Remember that some things are beyond a parish priest's control or authority. The diocese a parish is located in sets many parish policies. Sometimes decisions are made based on confidential information.
4. If you volunteer to do something, do it faithfully and to the best of your ability. If your work seems unnoticed, it means you are doing such a good job your parish priest no longer has to think about that area; he knows he can count on you.
5. If your parish does not have a parish administrator or financial manager, encourage your parish counsel to hire one if it is possible. A parish with a \$40,000 budget has as much paper work as a business with a \$400,000 budget. Priests can't visit the sick if they are filling out tax forms.
6. Be kind to the lay people responsible for the day to day business of running your parish. They make it possible for the priests of your parish to be ministers instead of administrators.
7. Remember that everyone needs a change of scenery and routine from time to time. Be gracious when a priest takes time off, whether it's for a retreat, to play golf, or to channel surf. Give him that time gladly.
8. Watch what you say to and about your parish priests in front of your children. They will model your behavior.
9. Eventually, your parish priest will do or say something you disagree with, or say "no" to a request. Before you write a letter or make a phone call, pray for God's guidance and your own understanding of what was

said or done, and then wait a few days. If you still feel the need to discuss an issue, be polite. Lay people have a right and obligation to speak up on anything that pertains to the good of the Church, but also an obligation to show respect for their pastors.

10. Remember that your parish priests are human. They are going to make mistakes and say things they shouldn't, just like the rest of us. In 2nd Corinthians Paul says of those who cause grief "you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him". (2Corinthians 2:7-8)

Making Dinner Table Conversations Count

Objective

Do you make dinner conversations count? How can you make it a richer experience, maximizing the opportunity to share, reach and teach your children?

Bible Readings

1. Psalm 131:12:
If thy children will keep thy covenant, and these my testimonies which I shall teach them: Their children also for evermore shall sit upon thy throne.
2. 1 Corinthians 13:11:
When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child.
3. Deuteronomy 11:19:
You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2223
Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones."
Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod. . . . He who disciplines his son will profit by him.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
2. Paragraph 1784
The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

Small Group Questions

1. How important in your family is having dinner together in the first place? Have you and your wife agreed upon a minimum number of dinners per week given work schedules, adult and kids' activities?
2. How do you make it a more valuable time together? Does everyone get to share experiences, ideas and feelings? Are both the positives and negatives welcomed?
3. Do you use any interesting conversation starters, questions, games etc. to get everyone to open up (avoiding one word answers like "fine", "good", "okay")?
4. How do you manage a balance of getting the kids to talk and adults communicating a message (avoiding being to preachy)

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

1. Dinner Conversations with Kids

<http://life.familyeducation.com/family-time/communication/34395.html>

On the Menu

Looking for more than a one-word answer from your kids about their days at school? These tips will get them talking.

[Talking with Kids About their Day](#)

[Communication Tips for Parents](#)

[Family Dinner: The Recipe](#)

[Build Family Ties Through Family Meals](#)

[Talking About Family History](#)

["Pass the Talking Fork, Please!"](#)

[100 Questions to Ask Your Kids](#)

[100 Questions to Ask Your Parents](#)

[Making Conversation](#)

More Food for Thought

Communicating with kids is the most important part of a parent's job. Unfortunately, it's also one of the hardest!

[Words to Parent By](#)

[Accentuate the Positive](#)

[Talking About Tough Subjects](#)

[Making the Connection with Teens](#)

[Staying Connected to Your College Kids](#)

2. FAMILY DINNER CONVERSATION STARTERS.....

http://www.iespta.org/files/FAMILY_DINNER_CONVERSATION_STARTERS.pdf

<p>What was the nicest thing you did for someone else today? What was the nicest thing that someone else did for you today?</p>	<p>If you were writing a newspaper article about your day, what would the headline be?</p>	<p>Tell us three adjectives that describe your day today.</p>	<p>In 60 seconds, tell us as much about your day as you can.</p>
<p>Teach us one thing that you learned today that you think we don't yet know.</p>	<p>If you were president, name three things that you would change about the country right away.</p>	<p>You are going to be alone on a deserted island for a year and you get to take one book/DVD/CD. What would you take?</p>	<p>Describe your perfect day, from the time you wake up until you go to bed.</p>
<p>If you could invent something that would make life easier, what would it do?</p>	<p>If you were running for mayor, what would be your campaign platform?</p>	<p>What movie character would you want to be?</p>	<p>If you could meet a person from history, who would it be?</p>
<p>Tell us the last joke that you can remember hearing.</p>	<p>If you could be an Olympic athlete, what event would you do?</p>	<p>If you could go on a vacation anywhere in the world, where would you go?</p>	<p>If you could make a movie, what would it be about?</p>

Habits – Good & Bad

Objective

We all have good and bad habits. Step back and take an objective view of what you do daily, weekly, monthly. If your life was being recorded, what would make the highlight reel and what would you prefer be deleted? How can we focus on improving /adding the good habits and getting rid of the bad ones?

Bible Readings

1. Proverbs Chapter 23

- 1 When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you,
- 2 And put a knife to your throat If you are a man of great appetite.
- 3 Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food.
- 4 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it.
- 5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings
Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.
- 6 Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, Or desire his delicacies;
- 7 For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!"
But his heart is not with you.
- 8 You will vomit up the morsel you have eaten, And waste your compliments.
- 9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.
- 10 Do not move the ancient boundary, Or go into the fields of the fatherless,
- 11 For their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.
- 12 Apply your heart to discipline, And your ears to words of knowledge.
- 13 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die.
- 14 You shall strike him with the rod, And rescue his soul from Sheol.
- 15 My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad;
- 16 And my inmost being will rejoice, When your lips speak what is right.
- 17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But live in the fear of the LORD always.
- 18 Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off.
- 19 Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.

Catechism Readings

1. PART III: Life in Christ; Section 1, Chapter 1; Article 2 –Our Vocation to Beatitude; pg. 429
<http://www.va/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a2.htm#>

IN BRIEF

1725 The Beatitudes take up and fulfill God's promises from Abraham on by ordering them to the Kingdom of heaven. They respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart.

1726 The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God.

1727 The beatitude of eternal life is a gratuitous gift of God. It is supernatural, as is the grace that leads us there.

1728 The Beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning earthly goods; they purify our hearts in order to teach us to love God above all things.

1729 The beatitude of heaven sets the standards for discernment in the use of earthly goods in keeping with the law of God.

Article 3 – Man’s Freedom, Pg. 433

Article 5 – The Morality of the Passions

<http://www.va/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a5.htm>

Small Group Questions

1. How can over-doing some habits be as bad as under-doing some things?
2. What habits might distract you, affecting your faith, family life, work, or your health ?
3. What habits are you willing to give up, or practice more? Start with ONE

Recommended Resources

1. Rediscovering Catholicism by Michael Kelly; Chapter 9, Page 129.
2. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, by Dr. Steven Covey

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
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Living Our Strengths

Objective

God endows all of us with innate talents and His purpose for us is to use these to become the best person we can be. We can honor God by using our talents. We make many choices every day, and each choice should be decided in the context of “Will this make me the best version of myself?”

Bible Readings

1. Galatians 5:13 – 26

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

2. Psalms Chapter 91

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

Say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust."

God will rescue you from the fowler's snare, from the destroying plague,

Will shelter you with pinions, spread wings that you may take refuge; God's faithfulness is a protecting shield.

You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day,

Nor the pestilence that roams in darkness, nor the plague that ravages at noon.

Though a thousand fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, near you it shall not come.

You need simply watch; the punishment of the wicked you will see.

You have the LORD for your refuge; you have made the Most High your stronghold.

No evil shall befall you, no affliction come near your tent.

For God commands the angels to guard you in all your ways.

With their hands they shall support you, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

You shall tread upon the asp and the viper, trample the lion and the dragon.

Whoever clings to me I will deliver; whoever knows my name I will set on high.

All who call upon me I will answer; I will be with them in distress; I will deliver them and give them honor.

With length of days I will satisfy them and show them my saving power.

Catechism Readings

1. PART III: Life in Christ; Section One; Chapter One, Article 6: Moral Conscience

<http://www.va/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a6.htm>

IN BRIEF

1795 "Conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths" (GS 16).

1796 Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.

1797 For the man who has committed evil, the verdict of his conscience remains a pledge of conversion and of hope.

1798 A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience.

1799 Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.

1800 A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience.

1801 Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt.

1802 The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed.

2. PART III: Life in Christ; Section One; Chapter One, Article 7: The Virtues

<http://www.va/archive/catechism/p3s1c1a7.htm>

1833 Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good.

1834 The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

1835 Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.

1836 Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.

1837 Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

1838 Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

1839 The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.

1840 The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object - God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake.

1841 There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them.

1842 By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

1843 By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.

1844 By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14).

1845 The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christians are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

3. PART III: Life in Christ: Section One: Chapter Two, Article 1: The Person and Society
<http://www.va/archive/catechism/p3s1c2a1.htm>

Small Group Questions

1. How often do I consult God about my discovering and employing my talents?
2. Do I incorporate the 7 virtues in applying my talents?
3. How can I become passionate about using my talents and earning God's grace?

Recommended Resources

1. Rediscovering Catholicism, by Matthew Kelly; Part 4

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
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Your Prayer Life & How Confession Fits In

Objective

Talk to the Lord lately? Anything you need to get off of your shoulders that might be weighing you down?

Those of us in Fathers Team are in various stages of a prayerful life. Use this session to discuss when and how we pray and why. Prayer is a part of our faith, how we pay homage to our Lord, ask for forgiveness and ask for help. Do you pray regularly? Do you pray the Rosary? This is not meant to intimidate fathers but to explore how some have brought prayer more into their life over the years.

Confession gives us grace to become stronger and fight sin in the future. Confession is a way for us to atone for our sins and to take the burden from our shoulders.

Bible Readings

1. Luke 11:1-4

1 And it came to pass, that as he was in a certain place praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. 2 And he said to them: When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. 3 Give us this day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.

2. Mark 11:24-26

Therefore I say unto you, all things, whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive; and they shall come unto you. 25 And when you shall stand to pray, forgive, if you have aught against any man; that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your sins. 26 But if you will not forgive, neither will your Father that is in heaven, forgive you your sins.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2761 – 2776

SECTION TWO

THELORD'SPRAYER

"OUR FATHER!"

ARTICLE 1

"THE SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE GOSPEL"

2761 The Lord's Prayer "is truly the summary of the whole gospel."⁷ "Since the Lord . . . after handing over the practice of prayer, said elsewhere, 'Ask and you will receive,' and since everyone has petitions which are peculiar to his circumstances, the regular and appropriate prayer [the Lord's Prayer] is said first, as the foundation of further desires."⁸

I. AT THE CENTER OF THE SCRIPTURES

2762 After showing how the psalms are the principal food of Christian prayer and flow together in the petitions of the Our Father, St. Augustine concludes:

Run through all the words of the holy prayers [in Scripture], and I do not think that you will find anything in them that is not contained and included in the Lord's Prayer.⁹

2763 All the Scriptures - the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms - are fulfilled in Christ.¹⁰ The Gospel is this "Good News." Its first proclamation is summarized by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount;¹¹ the

prayer to our Father is at the center of this proclamation. It is in this context that each petition bequeathed to us by the Lord is illuminated:

The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them.¹²

2764 The Sermon on the Mount is teaching for life, the Our Father is a prayer; but in both the one and the other the Spirit of the Lord gives new form to our desires, those inner movements that animate our lives. Jesus teaches us this new life by his words; he teaches us to ask for it by our prayer. The rightness of our life in him will depend on the rightness of our prayer.

II. THE LORD'S PRAYER

2765 The traditional expression "the Lord's Prayer" - oratio Dominica - means that the prayer to our Father is taught and given to us by the Lord Jesus. The prayer that comes to us from Jesus is truly unique: it is "of the Lord." On the one hand, in the words of this prayer the only Son gives us the words the Father gave him:¹³ he is the master of our prayer. On the other, as Word incarnate, he knows in his human heart the needs of his human brothers and sisters and reveals them to us: he is the model of our prayer.

2766 But Jesus does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically.¹⁴ As in every vocal prayer, it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father. Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us "spirit and life."¹⁵ Even more, the proof and possibility of our filial prayer is that the Father "sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"¹⁶ Since our prayer sets forth our desires before God, it is again the Father, "he who searches the hearts of men," who "knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."¹⁷ The prayer to Our Father is inserted into the mysterious mission of the Son and of the Spirit.

Small Group Questions

1. How often do you pray? Do you pray when you need something or pray for thanksgiving?
2. How does confession fit into your spiritual life? Do you go once a year at Answer the Call? Ever?
3. How can we make more time to talk to the Lord?
4. Can we challenge ourselves to improve our prayer life?

Included Resources

1. What the bible says about: prayer

http://www.essortment.com/all/prayerbiblejes_rzyg.htm

Prayer is the way that we communicate with God. It can have many purposes and formats. The Bible is full of advice on how to pray. Jesus himself prayed to his Father often and gave his apostles a model for speaking to God. In this article we will look at the various directives given throughout God's Word. We will also examine "The Lord's Prayer" as a model for ourselves.

God wants us to pray to Him. "Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you wonderful and marvelous things." (Jeremiah 33: 3) "If any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you." (James 1: 5) Jesus assumes that we will pray to God, "When you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen." (Matt. 6: 6) The Bible teaches that God wants us to pray to Him and assumes that we will.

Much prayer is supplication. We are asking God for something and acknowledging our inability to get it for ourselves. "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." (Matt. 7: 7) "I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people." (1 Tim. 2: 1)

Prayer requires faith. It is not a magic formula for getting what we want. The supplicant must trust that God is and can hear us. "Whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists" (Heb. 11: 6) "If you have faith as big as a mustard seed, you can say to this hill, 'Go from here to there!' and it will go. You could do anything!" (Matt. 17: 20)

When praying, we want to seek the will of God, not change it. "We have courage in God's presence, because we are sure that he hears us if we ask him for anything that is according to his will." (1 John 5: 14) Jesus taught through parables that persistence is important when praying. In the parable of the widow and the judge, the widow kept on demanding her rights until the judge got tired of all the trouble and granted her request. "Now, will God not judge in favor of his own people who cry to him day and night for help?" (Luke 18: 7)

There are some conditions for having our prayers heard. We need to seek God's will and persistence helps. Prayer requires an attitude of humility and repentance. "If I had ignored my sins, The Lord would not have listened to me." (Psalm 66: 18) "If they pray to me and repent and turn away from the evil they have been doing, then I will hear them in heaven, forgive their sins, and make their land prosperous again." (2 Chronicles 7: 14)

In the four [Gospels](#), Jesus led a life of prayer. He was always in communication with his Father. In every prayer where Jesus' words are recorded, he called God his Father. Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3: 21), when he was alone (Mark 1: 35, Luke 5: 16), all night (Luke 6: 12), many times. John chapter 17 records Jesus' long and moving prayer for his disciples.

Jesus was asked by one of the apostles, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11: 1) The prayer that he taught them is one that is repeated all over the world exactly as it appears in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus said, "In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

(Matthew 6: 9-13 NKJV)

Whether or not this prayer should be repeated and memorized is the subject of ongoing debate between many churches. I don't believe it particularly matters whether you can say it by heart or not. The important thing, as we have seen, is attitude. If it is prayed from memory on a rosary, as part of a congregational prayer, or even in our personal devotions, what are we thinking as we say it? I can remember saying the "Our Father" in school when I was a boy. I said it because I knew the words, not because I was really praying. I wouldn't assume that anyone else who prays it from memory is indulging in vain repetition.

For many, it is helpful to say the prayer with their lips while thinking about their requests. Often, the words for a heartfelt prayer are the hardest to find. The Lord's Prayer gives us the words while our [spirit](#) connects to God on a deeper level. I use the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for my own prayer life. What Jesus taught his apostles is a structure for prayer that starts with praise, followed by our needs (daily bread) and then asking for forgiveness and ending with more praise. It's a simple pattern and covers all of the bases.

What does the Bible say about prayer? God wants to hear our prayers. He wants us to have faith in him and be persistent with our requests, be humble and ask forgiveness, be bold and make our requests known to Him. Jesus gave us a prayer that we can learn to recite or use as a pattern for our own words.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Battling The New Atheism—Finding New Ways To Talk To Your Kids About Religion

Objective

Today's culture promotes atheism and moral relativism. We as fathers need to find ways to counteract the influence of the secular world and engage our children in discussions about faith and spirituality.

Bible Readings

1. Deuteronomy 4: 9-10

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."

2. Proverbs 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2222-2223

2222 Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfil God's law.

2223 Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones."³¹ Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them.

Small Group Questions

1. Do you talk to you children about faith and spirituality?

Recommended Resources

1. Answering the New Atheism – Scott Hahn
2. The Language of God – Francis S. Collins

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

1. How to Talk to Children About Religion

http://www.ehow.com/how_2103455_talk-children-religion.html

Step 1

Always be welcoming and encouraging--open to answering your child's questions about God and religion. Never make them feel uncomfortable, or like the topic is too complicated or inappropriate to address.

Step 2

Ask what specific questions they have. Getting to the details of what they're seeking to learn, as what they truly want to know may be very simple compared to getting into a complex conversation about the world, different religions and views, and the further questioning that can develop as a result of this discussion.

Step 3

Ask the child questions too, making the conversation interactive. Make sure you're explaining things at their level, and not talking "above" them. Using words like, "Does that make sense?" and "Do you have more questions about that?" can be helpful. It makes the child feel confident questioning the world around them.

Step 4

Be very honest with your child and answer his or her questions first according to your own beliefs. Explain that others hold different views on Heaven and Hell, God and other notions that are very real to some people, and not at all to others. Explain that it is a personal choice. If you can, share your open-mindedness about religion, and gradually teach the child about the many different beliefs people hold.

Step 5

Go to your local library and pick up a few books on the topic. If your child is a reader, let he or she read to learn more, coming back to you with questions. Or, read the books together.

2. Definition of Moral Relativism:

In philosophy moral relativism is the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect objective and/or universal moral truths, but instead make claims relative to social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances. Moral relativists hold that no universal standard exists by which to assess an ethical proposition's truth. Relativistic positions often see moral values as applicable only within certain cultural boundaries (cultural relativism) or in the context of individual preferences (individualist ethical subjectivism). An extreme relativist position might suggest that judging the moral or ethical judgments or acts of another person or group has no meaning, though most relativists propound a more limited version of the theory. In moral relativism there are no absolute, concrete rights and wrongs. Rather, intrinsic ethical judgements exist as abstracta, differing for each perception of an ethical outlook.

Some moral relativists — for example, the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre — hold that a personal and subjective moral core lies or ought to lie at the base of individuals' moral acts. In this view public morality reflects social convention, and only personal, subjective morality expresses true authenticity. (i.e. "Following one's conscience".)

Moral relativism differs from value pluralism — which acknowledges the co-existence of opposing ideas and practices, but accepts limits to differences, such as when vital human needs are violated. Moral relativism, in contrast, grants the possibility of moral judgments that do not accept such limits. As well, moral relativism should not be taken as the more extreme stance of moral nihilism, which completely denies the existence of any objective morality.

Symbology Of The Mass And Symbols In The Mass

Objective

What does all that stuff at mass mean?

Every week we sit through the mass but do we fully grasp the subtle meanings of what is happening. Take this opportunity to learn something new yourself and teach something new to other Fathers in the group. Remember that even many of the cradle Catholics of the team don't remember many symbols in the mass or perhaps were never taught. Take this opportunity to give a father a new meaning to sitting in that pew on Sunday.

Bible Readings

- INCENSE
 1. Luke 1:9

According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
 2. Revelations 8:3

And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.
- GARMENTS
 1. Exodus 28:4

And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate and an ephod and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre, and a girdle and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.
 2. Exodus 31:10

And the cloths of service, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office.
- HOLY OILS
 1. Exodus 31:11

And the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do.
 2. James 5:14

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1382

The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. But the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us.

Small Group Questions

1. What part of the mass has the most meaning for you?

2. How do we use symbols in our daily life? Logos, team mascots, user interface, how does this relate to our use of them in the church?
3. What new things will you look for in Mass? Is there anything you can have your children/grand children look for to bring new meaning to them?

Recommended Resources

1. What Do You See at Mass?
<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2006/0604fea2.asp>
2. Introduction, Gathering Rite, and Entrance Procession
http://www.sjy.org/Church/Exp_mass1.asp
3. The Mass
<http://www.davidmacd.com/catholic/mass.htm>

Additional Information

What Do You See at Mass?

Every Catholic Church Is Filled with Silent Sermons – But You Have to Understand the Language

By Anthony E. Clark

In 1941, a German bomb destroyed the chamber in which Britain's House of Commons had met for almost a century. Afterward, several members of Parliament suggested that the old Gothic-style chamber with choir-style stalls facing one another should be replaced by a more modern chamber, with seats fanned out in a semicircle, like the legislatures of France and America. Winston Churchill opposed the modernization, arguing before the House of Commons that "first we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."

Similarly, the material elements of the Mass—such as the altar with its linens, candles and flowers, the priest's vestments, and the crucifix—affect our hearts and minds even when we're unaware of it. If those elements are truly beautiful, they bring to mind the Psalmist's words:

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord (Ps. 84:1–2).

The beauty of the Mass is an invitation to the faithful to turn toward the Lord. The altar, the candles, incense, crucifix—even the flowers arrayed in the sanctuary—are means for the Church to reveal Jesus more fully to the faithful gathered to relive his Passion.

At Mass, the faithful can truly come *facie ad faciem Dei*—face to face with God. Pope Benedict XVI noted that sacred art and symbolism make "the Church's common faith visible." He suggested that holy images should "lead us beyond what can be apprehended at the merely material level, to awaken new senses in us, and to teach us a new kind of seeing, which perceives the Invisible and the visible" (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ignatius, 133).

What we see at Mass not only visually imparts the Church's teachings; it also brings us into a richer relationship with God, who, in St. Bonaventure's words, "descends upon the altar . . . [as] he did when he became man the first time in the womb of the Virgin Mary."

The Altar Is the Cornerstone

St. Padre Pio inscribed these words in Madame Katherina Tangari's missal: "If you want to assist at Holy Mass with devotion and fruitfully, keep company with the sorrowful Virgin at the foot of the cross on Calvary" (Tangari, *Stories of Padre Pio*, TAN, 133). In other words, approach the altar as if you are approaching the very place Jesus was crucified.

The first altar was the simple wooden table used by Christ at the Last Supper. The early Christians,

when they were safe from their persecutors, most likely celebrated the Eucharist in the same way. After Christianity was legalized under Constantine, Christians began to use stone altars, recalling the Gospel of Matthew, when Christ reveals that he is the "stone that the builders rejected [that] has become the cornerstone" (Matt. 21:42, English Standard Version). Through the ages, the altar-table (*mensa*) has represented the imperishable Church.

Altars today contain a small altar stone representing both Calvary—the rock on which our Lord was sacrificed—and Christ himself, "the spiritual rock" (1 Cor. 10.4, NIV). The altar stone is consecrated by a bishop in one of the most solemn liturgical events in the Church. Wine, salt, and ashes—representing the divine and human nature of Christ—are blessed and mixed in holy water to form a chrism. Using the chrism, the bishop traces five crosses upon the altar stone, symbolizing Christ's five wounds from which the grace of our salvation springs. Relics of saints, frequently martyrs, are placed beneath the altar-stone, recalling the image in Revelation: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (Rev. 6:9). The altar is installed in an elevated place to represent Calvary. When the priest approaches the altar to celebrate Mass, he is, *in persona Christi*, ascending to reenact Christ's sacrifice.

Shrouded in Glory

Since the most holy event on earth, the summit of Catholic life, occurs on the altar, the Church embellishes it with fitting symbols. In the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II wrote:

Like the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany, the Church has feared no extravagance, devoting the best of her resources to expressing her wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist (EE 48).

The white linens that adorn the altar recall the shroud that covered the body of our Savior after his death. They also symbolize the faithful, who are, as the Benedictine liturgist Fr. D. I. Lanslots said, "the precious garment of Christ." Typically, the altar cloths are blessed and cover the altar throughout the year—except on Holy Thursday, when the altar is stripped after Mass and left exposed on Good Friday to bring to mind the disrobing during Christ's Passion.

Candles announce that Jesus is the Light of the world: "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned" (Matt. 4:16). Candles used for Mass are made of wax, which consumes itself, representing Jesus, who sacrifices himself for us.

There is evidence that the practice of decorating the altar with flowers began with the early Christians. Cut flowers are a reminder of the garden of Eden, where neither man nor flower suffered death. One of St. Francis's disciples reportedly said, "Three things has God left us from the earthly paradise: the stars, the flowers, and the eye of a child." Their beauty recalls the life of Jesus, "a lily among brambles" (Song 2:2), but they soon wilt and die, recalling his death.

Him Whom They Have Pierced

The cross is another salutary representation in the celebration of Mass. Pious Catholics used to venerate the cross by making the sign of the cross when the processional crucifix passed by them at the beginning of Mass and then bowing respectfully toward the priest, who is *in persona Christi*. This beautiful practice is still seen in churches throughout France and has been happily observed at the reverently celebrated Mass at Mother Angelica's Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2002), the Church requires that there is a cross at the celebration of Mass "with the figure of Christ crucified upon it . . . where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation" (GIRM 308). The image of the suffering Christ "calls to mind for the faithful the saving Passion of the Lord"—and also for the priest, who is as Christ on Calvary as he celebrates Mass—and bears witness to the Gospel of St. John, which says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (John 19:37). Pope Pius XII wrote in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*:

The august sacrifice of the altar is therefore no simple commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ; it is truly and properly the offering of a sacrifice, wherein by an unbloody immolation

the high priest does what he has already done on the cross, offering himself to the eternal Father as a most acceptable victim (MD 68).

The crucifix is the most important material symbol during Mass, for as Justin Martyr said, "without the cross, the earth is not tilled." The Church, as Paul exclaimed, endeavors above all actions in the Mass to preach "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The crucifix above the altar reveals the entire meaning of the Catholic liturgy.

Cup of Salvation

The paten and the chalice, which hold the body and blood of our Lord after the consecration, are the most important objects on the altar. While the sacred vessels used by early Christians were certainly not as elaborate as those used in the Middle Ages, still, the early popes desired to make the chalices and patens used in Mass worthy of the dignity of their function. In the third century, Pope Urban I forbade the use of wooden chalices, and later pontiffs abolished the use of stone, glass, and horn. Currently, the Church asks that the chalice be made of precious metal and gilded. One symbol attached to the chalice is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for both contain the blood of the Lamb, and both dispense the blood that brings the grace of salvation to the faithful. Christ in Gethsemane cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39), and the hearts of the faithful answer at every Mass, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116:13).

Garments White as Light

The priest himself is a trenchant messenger of the Church's teachings. St. Ignatius of Antioch said that of all created dignities the priesthood is the most sublime; St. John Chrysostom asserted that one who honors a priest honors Christ, and one who insults a priest insults Christ. The office of the priesthood, which turns ordinary bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord, is perhaps higher than even that of the holy angels. For this reason the liturgy of the Church adorns priests with garments worthy of their function at the altar. The visible signs worn by the priest at Mass also inspire a greater understanding and respect for what occurs invisibly. The vestments worn by the priest include the alb, the cincture, the stole, and the chasuble; the vesting prayers said by the priest as he dresses for Mass disclose their meanings. The first vestment put on is the alb, a white garment covering the priest from his shoulders to his feet. Symbolizing the sanctifying grace of baptism, the alb is also reminiscent of Christ's transfiguration at Mount Tabor, when he appeared in garments "white as light" (Matt. 17:2). The color white also prompts the priest to remember the innocence and purity that are his callings. The vesting prayer is: "Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart; that being made white in the blood of the Lamb I may deserve an eternal reward."

The next vestment to be donned is the cincture, a cord fastened around the waist. It represents the cords that restrained Jesus as he was scourged, and it also evokes the modesty and moral constraint bound to the priestly ministry. The traditional vesting prayer attached to the cincture is: "Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may abide in me." The stole, derived from a neckpiece worn by the upper classes of society and associated with authority, is draped around the neck, expressing the spiritual authority he exercises in the duties of his office. It also symbolizes the ropes with which Christ was tied, reminding the priest of the burdens of his ministry. The vesting prayer of the stole is: "Restore to me, O Lord, the state of immortality, which I lost through the sin of my first parents and, although unworthy to approach your sacred mysteries, may I deserve nevertheless eternal joy."

My Burden Is Light

The most conspicuous garment worn by the priest during Mass is the chasuble, or outer vestment, from the Latin *casuala*, meaning "small house." Msgr. Peter Elliot notes that "the beauty and dignity of this most visible Eucharistic vestment is essential in a properly ordered liturgy" (Elliot, *Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite*, Ignatius, 125). When a new priest receives the chasuble at his ordination, the bishop exclaims to him, "Receive the sacerdotal garment, for the Lord is powerful to increase in you charity and perfection." The chasuble literally and symbolically overlays all the other vestments—as all other virtues begin with and rely on the supreme virtue of charity.

The chasuble originally consisted of rather large circular cloths with a hole in the middle for the

Symbology Of The Mass And Symbols In The Mass

priest's head to fit through; they were so large, in fact, that it required two assistants to fold each side to allow the priest's hands to emerge for the celebration of Mass. In time, though, chasubles were tailored to accommodate easier movement. Throughout the Middle Ages and into the twentieth century, the back of the chasuble (viewed by the faithful during the eucharistic prayer) was normally embroidered with an image of the cross or a Y-shaped symbol that represented Christ's arms stretched upward in his final agony. As the priest places this last vestment over his shoulders he intones, "O Lord, who hast said, 'My yoke is sweet and my burden light,' grant that I may so carry it as to merit your grace."

We Are Formed by What We See

In its perennial wisdom, the Church employs a principle similar to the one Winston Churchill professed in his address to Parliament: Like Churchill, the Church has declared that first we shape our churches and the material symbols in them, and then our churches and their symbols shape us. We are formed by the things we see, and the visual clues in the liturgy—the altar, its adornments, the sacred vessels, and the priestly vestments—influence how we perceive our religion. In turn, the Catholic form of celebrating Mass is made manifest in the material expressions of the liturgy and clarified by the visible symbols enshrined in the liturgical environment. The symbols used in Catholic worship cry to heaven at each celebration of the Holy Mass, *Quam terribilis est haec hora!* (How awesome is this hour!).

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

How Are You Going To Get Your Spouse To Heaven?

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting and have a plan to work this topic into a discussion with his wife. He should consider first what he is doing to encourage, promote, and grow in a holy life with his spouse. This includes talking and praying, not just actions!

Bible Readings

1. Genesis 2:18-24

18And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. 19And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. 20And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. 21And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2331 – 2336

2331 "God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image . . . God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion."¹¹⁵

"God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them";¹¹⁶ He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply";¹¹⁷ "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created."¹¹⁸

2332 Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.

2333 Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.

2334 "In creating men 'male and female,' God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity."¹¹⁹ "Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God."¹²⁰

2335 Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. The union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹²¹ All human generations proceed from this union.¹²²

2336 Jesus came to restore creation to the purity of its origins. In the Sermon on the Mount, he interprets God's plan strictly: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."¹²³ What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.¹²⁴

2. Paragraphs 2363 – 2365

The spouses' union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.

The conjugal love of man and woman thus stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity.

* Conjugal fidelity

2364 The married couple forms "the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator and governed by his laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent."¹⁴⁷ Both give themselves definitively and totally to one another. They are no longer two; from now on they form one flesh. The covenant they freely contracted imposes on the spouses the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble.¹⁴⁸ "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."¹⁴⁹

2365 Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one's given word. God is faithful. The Sacrament of Matrimony enables man and woman to enter into Christ's fidelity for his Church. Through conjugal chastity, they bear witness to this mystery before the world.

Small Group Questions

1. If she was asked, how would your wife say you are helping her get to heaven?
2. Who do you know that seems to be the most supportive spouse? What do they do that you could?
3. How do you pray together with your wife?

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. The Sacrament of Marriage
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0979.asp>
by Mary and James Kenny

Before a candlelit altar, a young groom takes the hand of his bride and vows: "Today I commit my body and spirit to you. I promise to try always to make our relationship grow through openness in communication; through trust in your willingness to work toward our mutual good; through faith in our love for each other even when that love seems hidden for the moment. "Today I promise you the freedom to grow and develop your talents and capabilities. I promise to rejoice in your personal growth and to work out with you any problems this growth entails."Today I pledge to join with you in a union that is meant to be fruitful. I promise to join with you in establishing a household that is open to the needs of others, where we can, so far as we are able, provide a place of warmth and belonging to those who have none."As this example shows, many Catholic brides and grooms today write their own marriage vows. The vow presented above covers three important areas for union and growth in the Sacrament of Marriage: mutual commitment, personal freedom and fruitfulness. We will explore these elements further as we probe more deeply into the nature of Christian marriage.

What is Christian Marriage?

Traditionally people have thought of marriage as a legal contract. On one level, it is that, but there are some essential differences. Unlike other legal contracts, the marriage contract is based on love. Marriage is not, as the German theologian Father Bernard Haring reminds us, a business contract for the purpose of getting

How Are You Going To Get Your Spouse To Heaven?

a job done. Marriage differs from a legal contract in that it is an open-ended contract, "for better, for worse." A legal contract attempts to spell out all possible conditions which might arise in the given situation. A decade or so ago, some couples attempted to write just such contracts for marriage. Most married people laughed. In marriage you make an unconditional promise, not knowing where the promise will lead, what the promise will entail. The unconditional promise is the essence of Christian marriage. Unlike trial marriage partners who hedge their bets and say "maybe," Christian marriage partners take a great risk and give an unconditional, resounding "yes!" Who can make such a total, unconditional promise, not knowing what the future will bring? Christians do, and Father James Burtchaell, theologian at the University of Notre Dame, suggests that Christians must therefore be considered a little bit crazy. Who can make such a promise? Only those people who were crazy enough to make another unconditional promise—to commit themselves to Jesus Christ in faith, again not knowing what faith will demand or where faith will lead. For in their relationship with each other, they are likewise daring to trust in the power of Christ's love shared in and through the Christian community.

Formerly Catholics often thought of the Sacrament of Marriage as a one-time blessing given at the wedding. Indeed the sacrament has a special significance on the wedding day itself but the sacrament and its power continue. Today there is more emphasis on the lifelong graces of marriage and on the couple's response to those graces. Sacramental marriage is not a one-time magic shot to see couples through life. Rather it is a lifelong blessing available to those couples who pledge themselves to fidelity, growth and service. As they continually reaffirm their "yes" to each other, they acknowledge, draw upon and witness to the power and presence of Christ in their lives. The permanent, open-ended unconditional pledge is frequently misunderstood. Isn't the Church old-fashioned? Why insist on permanence? The promise "for better, for worse" is not made by the Church. The promise is made by the bride and groom, who believe in Christ's word and in the kind of love he reveals. The Church witnesses and affirms their promise, and takes it literally—assuming people mean what they say.

What is Christian marriage, then? The Church's understanding of marriage, after reflection on God's word, can be summed up in this way: Marriage, as a Christian sacrament, is a lifelong and faithful union of a man and a woman mutually committed to sharing their life and love together. Modeled after and strengthened by God's own love for his people, it's an intimate partnership in which each person gives the other freedom to grow and which is directed toward bearing fruit. Now let us take a closer look at the three important aspects of marriage mentioned earlier and incorporated into this definition.

Mutual Commitment and Growth

The total pledge of Christian marriage is a promise of faithfulness in body and spirit. Faithfulness does not mean a complacent "settling in," a resigned sense that now we are stuck with each other whatever we become. Rather, faithfulness is commitment to grow as a couple in mutual support and affection.

- Mutual growth demands a concentrated effort to develop communication skills. Good communication is neither a matter of luck nor a natural endowment. It is a skill that can be learned. When partners share goodwill, mutual trust and the desire to communicate, they develop these skills by practicing them in their life together. When communication is difficult or becomes blocked, they might turn to one of the many books on communication such as *The Intimate Enemy: How to Fight Fair in Love and Marriage* by George Back and Peter Wyderi (Avon paperback books). Partners in a Christian marriage are committed to try throughout life to improve communication.

Openness is an essential part of communication. Many marriage differences are so trivial that partners are ashamed to face their own pettiness. She plans a busy weekend when he would prefer to sleep late and relax. He leaves clothes, towels and newspapers lying around while she struggles for neatness and order. When faced with such differences, some people flare up in anger, others withdraw into pouting or silence. Neither action promotes understanding. Mutual growth demands the open expression of feelings precisely at the times when openness seems most difficult and withdrawal seems most attractive.

- Mutual growth demands a delicate balance between assertiveness and surrender. Each partner must learn when to assert his or her own needs and wants and when to yield graciously to the wants and needs of the other. In that delicate balance, perhaps more than anywhere else, lies the secret of living together in lasting love.

- Mutual growth demands a positive outlook. On the wedding day, the bride or groom is seen as the best possible choice for a lifetime partner. No matter how many differences arise, no matter how many negative qualities appear, people retain good qualities.

For example, a methodical, highly organized woman chooses a partner whose spontaneity and impulsiveness charm her. Later, when his impulsive decisions frighten and irritate her, she may want to attack him for his decisions. If she is wise, she will recognize that she chose this man and continues to need him precisely because his personality balances her own. In a marriage committed to mutual growth, partners do well to keep their sights firmly focused on the positive and lovable qualities in each other.

- Mutual growth demands renewal. Marriage enrichment programs recognize a couple's need to get away together, to examine and renew their love. A special date with a spouse, a late dinner together, a weekend getaway for two all renew and deepen the affection which makes marriage not a business contract, but a union based on love.
- Mutual growth demands trust in the love a couple shares, even when that love seems to wane. All marriages face dry spells. Pressures from the outside world intrude. One becomes preoccupied, the other is away from home a lot. Weariness dulls the homecoming. The energy necessary to renew the marriage is just not available. Sometimes both can face the problem squarely and begin to plan positive alternatives. Sometimes they have only trust, the simple, quiet conviction that they will weather this dry spell and continue to grow because they took each other "for better, for worse," and meant it.

Personal Freedom

Paradoxically, the permanent, unconditional pledge of Christian marriage makes possible a personal freedom unknown in other unions. Christian marriage says two people are committed to each other, not merely under certain circumstances, but totally. They are partners and helpmates.

Sometimes people view marriage as the end of personal growth, something to "settle into" after they have developed their personal talents and achieved their personal goals. On the contrary, in a vital marriage each partner continues to develop individual gifts and to discover new abilities.

Total commitment enables Christian marriage partners to say to each other: "You will grow and change, and so will I. We know that; we expect it. Growth and change are not things to fear but are part of the adventure that is our life together. If growth leads you to success in paths I cannot follow, I will rejoice in your victory. If change means loss of health or disappointment, I will still be there. If change brings differences between us, we shall work them out. You do not have to be afraid to grow. You do not have to fear what growth will do to our marriage. Before all else, we are committed to working out our life together."

'Directed Toward Fruitfulness'

In *Marriage in the Modern World*, Father Bernard Haring tells us that marriage is a union based on love "directed toward fruitfulness." In that rich phrase lies sufficient challenge to make a marriage vital for a lifetime. Lovers about to be married often see only themselves in the marriage commitment. Marriage seems to involve just two, the cozy cottage, lovin' all the time.

However, love does not work that way. Love expands outwards. Mature lovers also love the world. That love for the world and everything in it is not merely a good feeling. It is part and parcel of the marriage commitment. Christian married love is necessarily directed outside itself toward others. Married couples live not only for personal growth, not only for mutual growth, but for something which is greater than themselves.

Raising children is the usual and natural expression of fruitfulness in marriage. Too often legalism has clouded our whole attitude toward children. Catholics have to have children, don't they, while non-Catholics do not? The more children you have the better Catholic you are, because, after all, you sacrifice everything else for the sake of children.

The Church has a consistently positive view on the bearing and raising of children because Christian marriage is directed toward fruitfulness. Married love expands to embrace others. Never has the Church set numerical quotas on children, nor has the Church ever claimed parents of large families were already canonized. There can be loving large families, loving small families, and loving childless couples. But never can Christian marriage be loving and at the same time unfruitful.

How Are You Going To Get Your Spouse To Heaven?

Father James Burtchaell affirms that it is not the number of children people bear but a generous attitude toward life and sharing and fruitfulness that marks Christian marriage. Outdated as it may sound to some, it is still very Christian to desire children, provided that desire is a generous expression of love made fruitful.

Most couples today will not have all the children biologically possible. In a truly fruitful union, their choice will not reflect relief at being spared this burden, but rather, regret that human finiteness prevents an unlimited expansion of their love.

A Larger Fruitfulness

Children are not the only expression of fruitfulness in Christian marriage. The couple that does not yet have children, the couple that will never have children, and the couple whose children are raised are all still called to fruitfulness. For Christians, marriage leads to family and family leads to household. A household involves more than a single set of parents and children; a household welcomes and shares with others on a temporary or permanent basis.

Formerly people turned to family throughout life to meet their basic needs. There they sought food and shelter and love. There they were born, educated, nursed when ill, cared for when old and buried at life's end. Today institutions have taken over almost all of these functions. Theologian and writer Rosemary Haughton suggests that families need to involve themselves anew in these traditional functions because institutional care is inadequate. Our systems of education, health care, care of the aged, welfare and prisons are not meeting all personal needs.

Family is the one institution that provides its members with a sense of belonging, of feeling related and having a heritage. Today, many people are cut off by distance or family breakdown from their family of origin. They have nowhere to turn for a sense of belonging. Christian couples and families therefore face the tremendous challenge of becoming households: to furnish a place of belongingness for the homeless child, the cast-off elderly person, the pilgrim seeking a way back to the world after a stay in a prison or a mental hospital, the teen who needs a breathing spell away from his or her own family.

For some families fruitfulness will mean permanent commitments to some people over a lifetime. For others fruitfulness will mean making room briefly and occasionally. For still others fruitfulness will mean a home perpetually marked by openness, hospitality and sensitivity to the needs of others.

A commitment to fruitfulness stretches a couple's embrace to many people. Commitment to others makes permanence in marriage not only an ideal but a practical necessity. On the practical level, if marriage involved only two people, and they discovered significant incompatibilities between themselves, their going separate ways might seem sensible. The scars incurred would only disfigure two. But when two people promise themselves to the world beyond their private lives, a network of interdependence is formed. Each needs and is needed by many others. The breakup of a couple is truly regrettable. The breakup of a household, however, is an upheaval which affects the very existence of all the members.

Because their marriage and the household they create are so vital, committed lovers learn to work out individual differences with each other, to weather dry spells, to subordinate their own needs to those of others. They are more than individuals, more than sharers in love. They are partners in an essential common task. In reaching out to others they can create a beautiful oasis and do the job which family does best: establishing a place of belonging, relatedness, stability and love in an unstable, lonely world.

Making & Keeping (Male) Friends

Objective

Remember when you were in college – how many friends you had? Think about now – how many men can you call friends – that are more than acquaintances – someone who would drop what they are doing to help you out? This session should help you assess your male relationships – MAKING AND KEEPING FRIENDS

Bible Readings

1. Luke 16:9 (Whole Chapter)

Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home. Or you will be welcomed into eternal homes.

2. John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 609

By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end", for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men. Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death.

2. Paragraph 1468

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament.

Small Group Questions

1. Have you taken an inventory of your male relationships? Who are friends—who will drop what they are doing to help you? Do you have the number of friends you want?
2. Looking back – are you investing enough time in those relationships? How?

Recommended Resources

1. How to Make and Keep Friends

<http://www.socyberly.com/Relationships/How-to-Make-and-Keep-Friends.442163>

2. Friendship Between Men:
Why it's Nearly Extinct and How You Can Reverse That
<http://www.sedona.com/lp-malefriendship.aspx>
3. Making and Keeping Man Friendships
<http://artofmanliness.com/2008/10/28/how-to-make-friends/>

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

- Social Barriers to Adult Male Friendships

Competition: **Men are competitive with one another (and therefore may feel a need to constantly “one-up” their friend).**

Traditional masculine stereotypes: Strong cultural stereotypes exist that suggest “real men” shouldn’t be emotional, intimate or dependent on other people -- particularly other men. The stereotypes also frown upon men showing a need or desire for close friendship.

Fear of homosexuality: Many men fear that if they appear too close with their male friends, they’ll be seen as homosexual.

- Men, Here’s How to Make, and Maintain, Adult Friendships:

Overcome emotional barriers, stereotypes and biases. tap your natural ability to let go of negative thought or communication patterns that may be keeping you from establishing meaningful adult friendships. This will help you to communicate more effectively, take action toward meeting new people and teach you to let go of any fears that may be keeping your from a close friendship.

Join a club/class/organization that interests you. Whether it’s painting, bicycling or investing, if you immerse yourself in an activity you love, it’s easy to meet others who enjoy doing the same things.

Do favors for your neighbors, and ask for favors from them. As studies have shown, men often bond over helping one another out. So if your neighbor asks to borrow a ladder, offer to give him a hand with the entire project. Likewise, don’t be afraid to ask your neighbors for help when you need it.

Establish a weekly time to meet with friends. To maintain contact with the friends you do have, set up a time each week to get together and see a movie, watch a sporting event or do whatever activity you like. The key is making a set time to regularly spend time with “the guys.”

Relationships With Adult Siblings

Objective

Do you have a sibling or two? When is the last time you called them? Went out with them? They are family – why don't you spend more time with them? In this topic – we will examine our relationships with our siblings and determine why we don't invest more time in that important relationship.

Bible Readings

1. 1 John 2:9-14:

9Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 10Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him[a] to make him stumble. 11But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. 12I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. 14I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:26

[A Call to Orderly Worship] Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2840

Now - and this is daunting - this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace.

2. Paragraph 2251

Children owe their parents respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance. Filial respect fosters harmony in all of family life.

Small Group Questions

1. Consider your relationship with your siblings – how is it? When is the last time you reached out to talk to them? Spend time with them?
2. If you are estranged from your sibling – what will it take for you to take the first step to repair the relationship?

Recommended Resources

1. Adult Sibling Relationships
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm99/fs06.html>
2. Sibling relationships
<http://www.faqs.org/health/topics/18/Sibling-relationships.html>

3. [Sibling Rivalry: Adult Siblings](http://www.foreverfamilies.net/xml/articles/sibling_rivalry_adult.aspx?&publication=full)
http://www.foreverfamilies.net/xml/articles/sibling_rivalry_adult.aspx?&publication=full

Reminders

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Stages of Marriage

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting understanding the stage of Marriage he and his wife are in and prepared to discuss how to take advantage of today's lesson to start getting the most out of their marriage.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:22-25

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. 24Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

Small Group Questions

1. Look at the stages of marriage described in the lesson – where are you and your spouse?
2. What are you doing to get the most out of the stage of marriage today?

Recommended Resources

1. Five Stages of Marriage
<http://www.songtime.com/sbc/sbcfivestagesofmarriage.htm>

Reminders

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Included Resources

1. Stages of Marriage
<http://www.stayhitched.com/stages.htm>

Most experts agree that marriage (and other long-term) relationships tend to evolve in common stages:

Romance or Honeymoon Stage - Couples are swept up in the excitement and romance of their relationship. Differences seem relatively unimportant (and can even be exciting), as they focus on discovering each other and sharing life together. Sexual attraction is usually strong. 'Getting bonded' brain chemistry prevails. Many couples assume that their relationship will naturally work itself out over time with love as sufficient motivation. Sometimes this stage lasts through early marriage, but the next 'reality' stage often sets in even before the wedding and can be the source of 'cold feet'. (See article on cold feet.)

Reality Stage - Couples learn more about themselves and each other in situations they haven't faced together before. Some of what they encounter may not be congruent with their pre-existing assumptions and expectations and may be conflictual. Once married, there is a lot more to disagree about than during dating or even living together. Some feelings of disappointment, aloneness and other reactions are normal, along with a let-down after the activity and excitement of the wedding period.

Because of challenging nature of this normal stage, the first two years of marriage have the highest risk of affairs and divorce. Many couples misinterpret this normal transition for incompatibility and often worry that they've made a mistake. They don't understand that many significant conflicts, while not resolvable, can be successfully managed and that this is normal in successful, happy marriages. They're often embarrassed to admit these reactions to their spouse, especially if they don't understand that these reactions are normal.

Often sex seems more routine as the initial 'rush' of sexual excitement and 'getting bonded' brain chemistry subsides and 'partner novelty' diminishes. Many people begin to feel that the 'spark' has left their relationship; that they aren't 'in love' any longer. This is another factor that couples often misinterpret. (See article on married sexuality.)

Childrearing Sub-Stage - The arrival of children is a particularly critical 'new reality' transition for marriages. Kids transform the focus of a family and can dramatically increase the stress level. There is simply so much more work, distraction, time pressure and potential conflict inherent in childrearing. Most marriages are not adequately equipped to cope well with this new family reality. It's very difficult to keep sufficient focus on the marriage relationship with the attention that kids demands, but it is essential to do so. The infancy of the second child is one of the riskiest periods in a marriage, since all these stress factors are multiplied with two young children requiring intensive attention in the family. (See our article on Becoming Parents.)

Couples who don't intentionally strategize and plan to keep their intimacy strong can begin to feel alienated and drift apart. This is why it's so important to have marriage preparation before the wedding or immediately after, before the more demanding marriage phases begin. It's a lot easier to plan to keep up the positive momentum of your relationship during the early phases than after problem patterns and habits have emerged. Unfortunately, many couples don't understand the need for this until negativity begins to be more of a factor.

Accommodation Stage - Couples work to renew their relationship on a down-to-earth basis by learning about their needs and managing their differences and areas of conflict. (See our article on Bonding & Marriage Success.)

Transformation or Success Stage - Couples enjoy the benefits of a marriage that satisfies their needs and provides mutual support. This leads to more profound intimacy over the years as the couple shares the experience of ups and downs. They work to keep it that way. There is another risky transition after about 16 years (when the first child enters adolescence).

It is very important to the success of your marriage that you understand these normal stages of marriage development, so you will be prepared for marriage's challenges. MST helps to minimize adjustment issues by helping you to lay the groundwork for mutual understanding and realistic expectations. The skills and habits that you develop in MST will facilitate your accommodation work and assist you in transforming your relationship to reach long-term success. With these stages in mind, you can see how important it is to begin the process of preparation early in your relationship.

The Power Of Marital Communication: Taming The “Loop”

Objective

Personal and marital growth are enhanced when couples are able to effectively communicate. We examine some communication challenges and ways to aid our journey towards better awareness and a more open form of communication in our marriage.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:25-33:

25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, 27and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30for we are members of his body. 31"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."[b] 32This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

2. Ephesians 4:2-6:

2Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

3. Ephesians 5:15-21:

15Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 21Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2334

"In creating men 'male and female,' God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity." "Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God."

2. Paragraph 16448

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. Spouses who with God's grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.

Additional Information

Our relationship with our spouse deserves the highest form of respect; a respect superior to any other relationship we have. Please consider a baseball analogy with regards to marital communication. You score a run by identifying the problem at first base. At second base, parties reach agreement. At third base, both decide on action. Finally, to score at home, parties must verify completion of the agreement.

If completion can't be verified, no "run" is registered and you are forced to start over again at first base to resolve the same issue. This "loop" of unresolved issues hinders your ability to score the most runs, wasting marital time and resources.

Small Group Questions

1. Please rank these six in order of importance with regard to effective communication: Why? Personal strengths? Personal weaknesses?
 - a. Listening
 - b. Commitment
 - c. Cooperation
 - d. Carry through
 - e. Respect
 - f. Maturity
2. Please rank these seven in perceived effectiveness for communication: Why? Personal strengths? Personal weaknesses?
 - a. Setting aside regular time for just the two of you.
 - b. Compromise
 - c. Expressing Appreciation
 - d. Praising specific things your spouse did right.
 - e. Forgiving past mistakes (Grudges and past resentments are counter-productive).
 - f. Don't Prejudge. Listen to what your partner has to say.
 - g. Humor. You know what cracks her up.
3. Can you and your spouse agree to disagree if necessary? How would you know or decide when to get help outside of your marriage with any unresolved problem?

Reminders

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The Power Of Marital Communication: About The Children

Objective

“How to resolve problems without the children, when it’s about the children”

Positive growth among a family is fostered when mutual respect is promoted within the family unit. Attaining agreement on a myriad of child rearing issues and concerns is a challenge facing most modern families. Balancing a child’s input regarding issues in his/her life vs. parental control grows in complexity as your children grow older. Various approaches can be effective as parents strive to resolve child issues, sometimes without the children’s input.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 6:1-4:

1Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

2. Colossians 3:18-21:

18Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

3. 1 Corinthians 13:11:

11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2221-2224

Catechism 2221

The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. "The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute." The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.

Catechism 2222

Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.

Catechism 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod. . . . He who disciplines his son will profit by him.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities. Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies.

Additional Information

Part of the responsibility in our relationship with our spouse is to raise our children together with little or no conflict. Our children are a gift from God even if at times they may seem to be a curse. God has blessed us with our children in an effort to help both us as parents as well as the children themselves grow in faith, hope and love.

Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

Small Group Questions

1. Discuss the idea that a “united front” is the best way to gain a son/ daughter’s compliance in family decisions. What are some useful strategies to keep children from using the “divide and conquer” ploy?
2. How do you get a child to comply appropriately to the parent’s solution plan? What dynamics change as your son/daughter ages?
3. Does it matter to you if your children agree with the decision you and your spouse have arrived at? Is there any truth to the notion that there are three approaches/options/choices to every problem?

Reminders

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Opposites Attract When You Get Married – Then Later Opposites Repel

Objective

Remember when those habits she has seemed cute and funny – well what happened? Many times what attracted us when we were younger become annoying to us later in life as the pressures of everyday living come to bear. Use this session to give examples that will resonate with the group of how things that attracted us or didn't bother us earlier in life can develop into issues. Then find men in the group who have found ways to accept differences and embrace them. How have they neutralized issues and not allowed it to simply drive them apart?

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 19:1-10

1 And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea, beyond Jordan. 2 And great multitudes followed him: and he healed them there. 3 And there came to him the Pharisees tempting him, and saying: Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 4 Who answering, said to them: Have ye not read, that he who made man from the beginning, Made them male and female? And he said: 5 For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh.

6 Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. 7 They say to him: Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put away? 8 He saith to them: Because Moses by reason of the hardness of your heart permitted you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery. 10 His disciples say unto him: If the case of a man with his wife be so, it is not expedient to marry.

2. Genesis 2:21-25

21 Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam: and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. 22 And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. 23 And Adam said: This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. 24 Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh. 25 And they were both naked: to wit, Adam and his wife: and were not ashamed.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1605

Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that the man should be alone."⁹² The woman, "flesh of his flesh," his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a "helpmate"; she thus represents God from whom comes our help.⁹³ "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."⁹⁴ The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been "in the beginning": "So they are no longer two, but one flesh."⁹⁵

2. Paragraph 1644

The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh."¹⁵³ They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving."¹⁵⁴ This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in

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Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

Small Group Questions

1. How has your wife changed since you met and married? Did you find the changes attractive or annoying?
2. Do you openly discuss conflicts or difference of opinion or hold them as a grudge?
3. How could you improve your relationship by appreciating the differences between you and the similarities?

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Included Resources

1. Opposites Attract, but after marriage??!

<http://all4love.wordpress.com/2009/02/24/opposites-attract-but-after-marriage/>

I took a personality test recently and turns out, I am a Melancholic person. I wasn't very surprised! When my husband came back from work, I asked him to take the same test... and guess what, he is a Choleric person! The exact opposite of my personality!

I guess we all get attracted to our opposite personalities. I admire his deep voice that resound with authority, when I am the quite type looking for security. I admire how he is self motivated when I struggle with low self image. He looks at the bigger picture and is amazed at my eye for details... He admires how I am sensitive to people's need which he fails to notice... He likes to lead and I like to follow. He has a need for change and admires my creativity. The list could go on and on...

But for some reason, we start seeing less of our own weakness and more of our partners weakness after marriage! The same things that once attracted you to each other becomes the reason for friction after marriage... Your eye for details make you realize he doesn't fulfill your small small dreams... but he doesn't understand why you dont see the bigger picture that he is working so hard to keep you happy! You suddenly realize that you dont agree with almost anything...

When we stop and kill the self, we will have a better life... a better marriage... There is no perfect person... With every set of strengths come accompanying weaknesses. Its like we subconsciously choose a person who fills in our weak areas so that the two of us fit together and become one! When we focus on each others assets, instead of the weakness we will be able to fill each other's empty spaces!

If you wish to see the different strengths and weaknesses of your personality type visit the website http://www.wedplan.com/plan_answers.php

God Bless!

2. Problems after Marriage

<http://www.articletrader.com/society/divorce/problems-after-marriage.html>

Life of a Human Being is full of troubles. It is a perfect blend of happiness as well as grief at the same point of time. Most of the times people face incidents, which is much unexpected. During different phases of life, a person can face various kinds of problems, one such important and integral phase of life starts after marriage.

Marriage is a bond between two people of different genders. Its a lifetime commitment for each other, a promise to be together in every walk of life, be it full of happiness or sorrows or a mixture of both. But

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above all, marriage is the most beautiful relation that every person face at a point of time in life. We get a companion for life after this pious event. But human being is so immature and impatience, they become a reason of problem for themselves due to their own selfishness or desires. To keep the spark, essence and passion in relation between life partners, mutual trust, and respect for each others opinions and feelings is necessary.

Although problems in marriage are an obvious thing, because two minds are never alike, there are some points where individual opinions of both genders can vary. Two individuals used to have different personality, a different way of thinking, different state of mind, and different approaches to handle things. Such differentiations are a reason of conflict most of the time. The situation becomes worse when ego of any of the partners or both of them clashes. There are lots of responsibilities to bear for both people associated in marriage. Both the partners used to have some expectations from their spouses. If they are not up to the mark on expectations of their spouses then the problem arises.

The common problems after a marriage can be:

1. The feeling of different attitudes, likes, and way of living among couples
2. Inability to understand each other
3. Lack of interest in each other's life and work

The possible reasons can be:

1. Financial problems in family
2. Sexual problems
3. Lack of proper communication between partners
4. Problems with in-laws

Well all the problems and possible causes are curable, one need to be a bit more cautious for solutions. Sit and talk openly about the problems being faced. Its always the best solution to sit together and discuss the probabilities of conflict and possible solutions. There is no problem in life that is not curable. You need to be a bit more caring for spouse, and determination to solve those problems.