

# Sacrament of Marriage

## Session Focus

This session explores the Sacrament of Marriage. It explores what we say Amen to as we celebrate Marriage—both the couple celebrating the sacrament and the church community. Participants explore how the faithful love of marriage witnesses to God’s faithful love for all and calls each of us to be faithful witnesses of God’s love to others.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament” (1601).

“God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes” (1604).

“The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist. Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant” (1617).

“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” (1648).

## Learning Objectives

This session on Marriage guides learners of all ages to...

- comprehend marriage as a commitment to and witnessing of God’s faithful love for God’s people
- value and appreciate the Sacrament of Marriage
- be witnesses of God’s faithful love and provide concrete support to married couples

## Session Overview

**Part 1. (10-15minutes)**

**Gathering and Opening Prayer Service**

**Part 2. (20 minutes)**

**All Ages Learning Experience: Marriage Sharing or Marriage Interview**

**Part 3. (80-90 minutes)**

**In Depth Learning Experience: Sacrament of Marriage**

- Option 1. Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format: Participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

**Part 4. (20 minutes)**

**Sharing Learning Experiences**

**Part 5. (10 minutes)**

**Closing Prayer Service**

## Design Options for In-Depth Learning

### Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of catechists who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leader catechists to have one catechist work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

#### **Facilitation Tips for This Format:**

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, catechists and small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

### Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators and catechists to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

### **Facilitation Tips for This Format**

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while catechist move from table to table assisting.

## **Materials Needed**

### **Gathering**

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service – copies for the leader and readers
- Bible

### **All Ages Opening Learning Experience**

- Paper and pens for writing questions

### **In-Depth Learning Experience**

- Handouts
- Supplies for learning activities (see activity descriptions to ascertain which supplies are needed for each activity)

### **Closing**

- Closing Prayer Service—copy for the leader and musicians
- Bible

# Session Plan

## Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer (15-20 minutes)

### Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or handout that lists the order of the activities or create a PowerPoint presentation that guides people through the session.

### Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session—you can also distribute handouts for the activities at the beginning of the activity.
- Invite people to share a meal. Depending on the time of day, the program may end with a meal. Some optional learning activities for use during the meal follow below. These may be used as the table waits for food or waits for other groups to be finished eating.

### Wedding Traditions

Invite participants to share stories and items of interest, including folklore, about weddings in their family or culture. For example, if you are single and catch the bride's bouquet you will be the next one to be married. If you are single and place a piece of wedding cake under your pillow when you sleep that night you will dream of the one you are to marry, etc.

### Love Song Challenge

Invite participants to create a list, as long as possible, of all the songs they know that contain the word love in them.

### Discussion Questions

- What do you think is the hardest thing about living one's marriage commitment?
- What are the gifts the sacrament of marriage offers the Christian community?

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using your own words or the words below:

This session explores the Sacrament of Marriage. It explores what we say Amen to as we celebrate Marriage—both the couple celebrating the sacrament and the church community. This session calls us to see how the faithful love of marriage witnesses God's faithful love for all and calls us to be faithful witnesses of God's love to others.

## 1. Group Formation

For the Whole Group In Depth Learning Experience or the Age Group In Depth Learning Experience Format organize the participants into three types of groups: family clusters of two or more families, groups of adolescents, and groups of adults.

For Learning Experience 1, "Imagining One's 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary", have adults and teens integrated into learning groups. This will provide for some good intergenerational dialogue.

For the Sharing Learning Experiences (Part 4) participants will need to be in intergenerational groups of approximately eight people, reflecting the age diversity of the participants.

Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational—children, teens, parents, and grandparents—keep them together in one group.

## 2. Opening Prayer Service

### Preparation

Recruit volunteers for the reading of 1 John 4:7-12 and for the quote from the catechism.

Before prayer, teach the assembly how to fasten their ribbons to the ring. (See list of materials below.) A recommended way to do so is using a simple clove hitch knot. The ribbon is folded in half, placed over the ring, and the two ends are pulled through the loop created by the fold.

Play background music for the writing on and hanging of the ribbons.

### Materials

- ribbon, preferably in a variety of colors, approximately 18 inches long and half an inch wide, one per participant or household
- fine point markers to write on the ribbons
- a large ring (a hula hoop would work well), either suspended from the ceiling like a chandelier (about 4 feet above the floor) or being supported by a stand that enables participants to easily attach their ribbons to it

### Gather

Communicate the following using the words below or your own words.

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

What does a ring have to tell us about love and faithfulness? God's love for us has always been there; it has no beginning or end just like a ring. A ring has no specific spot on it that marks its beginning, and no specific spot that marks its ending. A ring can also be likened to the circle of life. All life flows from one moment into the next, connecting us as human beings on our path to living and seeking God's eternal life.

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

And so we pray.

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

### **Listen**

Proclaim (either by one person or a variety of voices, each taking one line) the following Scripture to the assembly: 1 John 4:7-12

Proclaim the following Catechism quote, reading from the catechism:

“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” (1648).

### **Respond**

Communicate the following ideas using your own words or the words below.

Is love an emotion, a feeling that comes and goes and makes us feel warm inside? Or is it a decision to care for another?

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

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

### **Go Forth**

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

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

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

## Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)

The All Ages Learning Experience is designed to help the participants listen to a variety of married couples share their story and experience of marriage. The first option includes a variety—according to length of marriage—of two or three married couples who share their story with the large group. The second is a group interviewing a married couple about their experience of the sacrament of marriage.

### Materials Needed

- Handout #1 for Large Group Presentation
- Handout #2 for Small Group Presentation
- Handout #3 (Instruction for Table Group Use)

### Large Group Presentation: Sharing the Story—Faith Sharing on Marriage

Invite two or three married couples who have been married for varying lengths of time to prepare a five-to-seven-minute informal presentation using the questions below (also found on Handout #2). Invite couples with children and those who have not been able to conceive or adopt children to participate in the sharing. Encourage both spouses to speak about their experience. You may want to have a preparation meeting so they can rehearse their stories with each other.

Ask the couples to give you a wedding picture and a picture of their family if they have one. Scan them into your computer and use them as PowerPoint images as the couple shares their story.

### Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage

1. How did you meet?
2. When in your relationship did you hear God calling you to celebrate the sacrament of marriage with each other?
3. How did the proposal of marriage take place?
4. How do you remember feeling the night before your wedding day?
5. What do you treasure most about your wedding day and the celebration of the sacrament?
6. What challenges have you had to face as a married couple?
7. What gifts and blessings are part of your relationship?
8. What humorous moments or learning moments surface for you?
9. How do you think marriage witnesses to others God's faithful love? How are faith and your relationship with God part of your marriage?

### Small Group Presentation: Marriage Interview

This learning option provides for a more intimate conversation between a married couple and the participants. Sitting in intergenerational groups, participants are invited to ask questions of a married couple about the Sacrament of Marriage.

Before the session, recruit a married couple to be interviewed by each table group. Invite married learners to be interviewed even if they may have children in the table group. Share with the married couples the questions on Handout #3 to prepare themselves for the potential questions the group may ask. Give each table group Handout #3 as a guide. Reassure the married couples that they can pass on any questions they do not feel comfortable answering.

## Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience: The Sacrament of Marriage (80-90 minutes)

### Families with Children Learning Experience

The introduction is done with the entire community. The remaining three activities need to be conducted in order because the timing is different for each one. They can take place at table groups or individual learning activity centers. Learning activity centers are facilitated by a leader. Tables and chairs are essential so that individuals and families can learn, create, and discuss.

#### Introduction. God's Faithful Love Is Like...

The introduction explores Scripture portrayals of God's faithful love and challenges participants to identify how they share love with others.

##### Materials Needed

- Play doh
- Bibles (one for each group, unless you use Handout #5, which contains the Scripture passages)
- Handout #4 (if you have enough Bibles)

#### Activity

Give each group a copy of Handout #4 and a Bible, or Handout #5. Families with children can work together on this activity. Introduce the activity in your own words or the words below.

As Catholics we believe that marriage witnesses to us God's faithful love for God's people. The New Testament offers many stories and examples of what God's faithful love is like. In this learning experience we are going to read some of those stories and talk together about what God's love is like. Using the handout, your table group should read each story, then complete the phrase on the handout, "God's love is like ...", before moving on to the next Scripture passage. You may complete the phrase using words you will record on the handout, or you may use the play doh to fashion an image.

Allow groups approximately fifteen minutes to work on the exercise.

#### Activity 1. A Marriage Program Cover Design

##### Preparation

Place the materials for this activity on each table, one piece of card stock for each family.

##### Materials Needed

- 8.5x11 card stock folded in half length-wise to resemble the cover of a program or booklet
- markers and crayons or stamps for decorating
- Handout #6



## Activity

Communicate the following in your own words or the words below.

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

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

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

When finished, invite families to share their program covers with other families.

## Activity 2. The Rite of Marriage: Building a Home

We will use the analogy of building a home to explore the Rite of Marriage, and what the prayers, movements, and symbols tell us about the meaning of marriage. Participants can work independently or in small groups. Parents should work with their children on this activity.

### Materials Needed

- markers or crayons
- Handout #9

## Activity

Give each person a copy of Handout #9. Then share the following in your own words or the words below.

### Entrance Procession and Welcome

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

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

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

## **Opening Prayer**

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

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

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

## **Liturgy of the Word**

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

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

What does the passage tell you about love?

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

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

## **Consent**

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

The priest or presider says to the couple:

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

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

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

The couple then shares their vows with one another.

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

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

### **Blessing of the Rings**

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

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

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

### **General Intercessions**

The prayers of the faithful remind us that we stand before God with the needs of others, and that married life is not just about selfish love but about love that serves and welcomes others. Through the general intercessions the couple and the community say AMEN to being a people of service to the kingdom of God, a people who are called to pray for and journey with all those in need.

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

### **Nuptial Blessing**

The nuptial blessing says:

“Father, keep them always true to your commandments.

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

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

May they live to see their children's children.

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

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

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

If time permits, invite individuals or families to share their home with another person or family.

## Activity 3. Wreath of Blessing: Supporting the Sacrament of Marriage

### Preparation

Place the materials on the tables for families to work with. Each household or participant needs a circle-shaped wreath, which can be made of craft foam, grape vine or willow, Styrofoam, or sturdy cardboard. The wreath will be decorated with hearts which can be made from construction paper, precut foam shapes, wooden shapes, or whatever will work well with the base material used for the wreath.

### Materials Needed

- Handout #12
- Wreaths, one per household
- Small paper hearts
- Pens or markers

## Activity

Invite families to read each quote on the handout and discuss what it means, using the reflections that follow each quote. For each quote and reflection, invite them to create a blessing on a small paper heart to paste onto their wreath.

Communicate the following in your own words or the words below.

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

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

### Made for Each Other

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

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

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

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

### **Intimate Partnership**

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

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

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

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

### **Free Consent**

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

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

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

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

### **Daily Choice**

“This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; it must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves ...so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more

in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbor" (*Casti Connubii* #23).

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

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

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

### **Witness to God's Love**

"God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love.<sup>90</sup> Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes" (CCC #1604).

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

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

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

### **Your Own Blessings**

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

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

If time permits, invite each family to share blessings with another family.

# Adolescents Learning Experiences

## Introduction: God's Faithful Love Is Like...

This activity is done with the whole community and can be found at the beginning of the Families with Children Learning Experiences.

### Activity 1. Exploring God's Love in the World: Love Song Challenge

#### Materials Needed

- Handout #7

#### Activity

Invite the adolescents to think of the songs they know that have the word love in them. Using the handout, ask them to write down the names of the songs in the first column.

In the second column, have them consider what each song says about love.

In the third column invite them to compare the list of the love attributes found in the songs to the attributes of God's love found in the Scripture passages they explored (Handout #4) and to their own knowledge and experience of what God's love is like. Then ask them which list seems to have the healthiest articulation of what love is.

Have them give their reasons in the fourth column.

Invite the teens to share their responses with each other.

### Activity 2. Preparing the Rite of Marriage—What Choices Would You Make?

Adolescent participants are invited to journey through the rite of marriage and imagine that they are preparing to celebrate the sacrament of marriage. They are preparing the rite in anticipation (imaginary) of how they will celebrate the sacrament. The handout points out the choices to them and challenges them to articulate the reasons behind their choices. For example, why would they choose to be given away by their parent instead of processing down the aisle with their partner?

#### Materials Needed

- Handout #10

#### Activity

Give a copy of Handout #10 to each participant.

Direct them to read through the handout and complete the questions in column three.

When finished, have the adolescents discuss their responses with those in their small group.

## Activity 3. Exploring Church Teachings on Marriage

### Preparation

Cut up the numbered quotes and discussion questions on Handout #13, keeping the quote and questions together. Roll them up and place each one in a plastic wedding ring available at craft or wedding supply stores. Each participant or group, depending on the size of the group, receives a minimum of one quote to work with.

### Materials Needed

- Flip chart paper and markers or power point is needed to gather the information from the brainstorming of marriage support strategies or programs that a parish could provide.
- Plastic rings
- Handout #13 cut into sections
- Flip chart paper and markers (unless using a PowerPoint for the brainstorming of marriage support strategies)

### Activity

Depending on the size of group, give each participant or small group one of the wedding rings containing a quote. Invite them to read the quote, seek to understand it, and to formulate a response to the discussion questions.

Invite them to share their quote and question responses with the group. Allow time for the group to react and respond to the quote before moving on to the next quote.



# Adult Learning Experiences

## Introduction: God's Faithful Love Is Like...

This activity is done with the whole community and can be found at the beginning of the Families with Children Learning Experiences.

### Activity 1. Imagining One's 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary

#### Materials Needed

- Handout #8

#### Activity

Give each participant a copy of Handout #8. Communicate the following:

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

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

After participants have written their reflections, invite them to share with one or two others at their table. Tell them to share only what feels comfortable.

### Activity 2. Guided Tour of the Theology in the Rite of Marriage (25 minutes)

#### Materials Needed

- Handout #11
- Flip chart and marker to record ideas (PowerPoint could also be used for this)

#### Activity

Give a copy of Handout #11 to each participant. Direct them to read through columns one and two for each part of the rite and then discuss the questions in column three with those in their small group. At the end of the discussion, invite the adults to brainstorm a list of ways that the parish community can better support married couples and therefore the Sacrament of Marriage.

### Activity 3. Exploring Church Teachings on Marriage (30-40 minutes)

See Activity 3 under Adolescent Learning Experiences for this activity. You can choose to separate adolescents and adults or keep them together in intergenerational groups.

## Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20 minutes)

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Ask participants to gather in intergenerational groups and to share what they have learned and created: marriage program cover, house, wreath of blessing, play doh images of God's love, and so on.

Invite them to share their responses to the following question:

What did you learn about marriage? What thought, phrase, or image are you carrying home with you?

## Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

### Gather

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

### Listen

"So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (1 John 4:16)

### Respond: Blessing of Married Couples

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

- If you have been married less than two years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married two to five years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married six to 15 years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married 16-25 years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married 26-40 years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married 41-50 years, please stand and remain standing.
- If you have been married longer than 50 years, please stand and remain standing.

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

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

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

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

Amen.

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

(Rite of Marriage #127)

### Go Forth