

GOD'S PLAN FOR
A JOY-FILLED
Marriage

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Part 1: | Catholic Faith & Your Marriage

It is the common experience of those who work with engaged couples that the faith of these couples is most often in need of rediscovery, nourishment, and maturation. Part I of the workshop is evangelistic in nature. With clear respect for the freedom of each person, it encourages an encounter with the person of Christ through a call to faith in the fundamental truths of Catholicism. Following the basic Christian schema of "Creation, Fall, and Redemption," Part I provides a reflection on the Word of God as understood by the Church in regard to God's plan for marriage and our need for Christ. It also helps couples to understand the nature and meaning of the commitments they make in their exchange of vows. Part 1 includes three presentations:

PRESENTATION 1:

God's Plan for Marriage "In the Beginning"

(Male and Female He Created Them)

Following Christ's words that direct us to reflect on God's plan for marriage "in the beginning" (Mt 19:8), this presentation offers a simple catechesis on marriage as found in Genesis chapters 1-3. It focuses on the image of God in man and woman, the call to love as God loves inscribed in masculinity and femininity, and the impact of the Original Sin on the marital relationship.

PRESENTATION 2:

Christ Restores God's Plan for Marriage

(Male and Female He Redeemed Them)

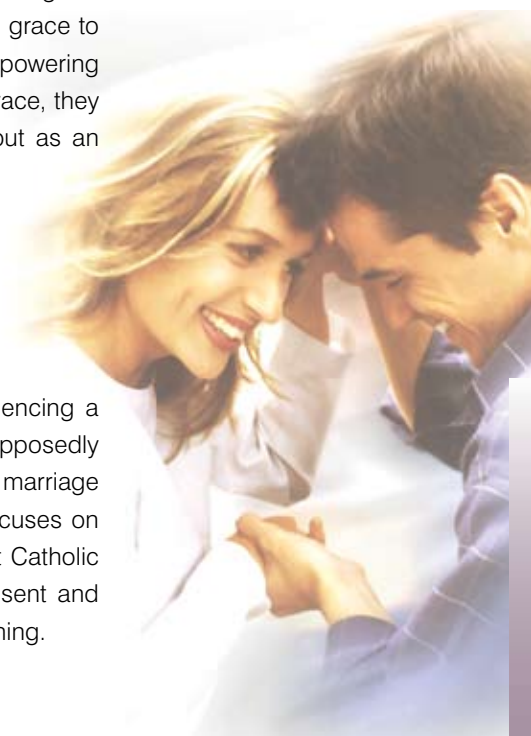
Beginning with the miracle at the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-11), this presentation reflects on the "good news" of Christ's redemption of the marital relationship. It focuses on the power of God's grace to heal the relationship between man and woman, effectively transforming our hearts and empowering us to love "as Christ loves the Church." To the degree that couples enter into this gift of grace, they experience the Church's teaching on marital love not as a list of prudish prohibitions, but as an invitation to embrace the love that truly satisfies.

PRESENTATION 3:

What Are You Saying "I Do" To?

(The Basics of Marriage in the Church)

This presentation was inspired by the testimony of numerous couples who, after experiencing a divorce and obtaining an annulment, lamented that no one had told them what they were supposedly committing themselves to by marrying in the Church. Beginning with a basic definition of marriage gleaned from Canon Law and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, this presentation focuses on the nature of marriage as a sacrament. With the aim of helping couples understand what Catholic marriage is (and isn't), this presentation provides a guided tour of the exchange of consent and concludes by explaining what makes a marriage valid or invalid according to Catholic teaching.



Part 2: | Sacramental Sexuality

While many factors have contributed to the breakdown of marriage and family life, special attention must be given to the widespread acceptance of new sexual attitudes and “lifestyles.” There is no sidestepping this often difficult aspect of marriage preparation. What is needed is a compassionate approach that explains the beauty of the Church’s teaching and, with full respect for people’s freedom, invites couples to embrace it. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* provides the positive approach we need. Building on the foundation laid in Part 1, Part 2 of *God’s Plan for a Joy-filled Marriage* presents the joys of “sexual honesty” before and within marriage. Part 2 includes three presentations:

PRESENTATION 4 :

The Joy of Sexual Honesty Before Marriage

Beginning with an examination of cultural attitudes and influences regarding sexuality, this presentation is designed to help couples distinguish mature sexual love from its cultural counterfeits. With compassion and sensitivity, it encourages couples to reserve sexual intimacy for that time when it can be an honest renewal and enactment of the marriage covenant. It also encourages couples to re-examine past attitudes and choices that may have negatively influenced their understanding of sexual intimacy. It should be noted that surveys have indicated a very favorable response to this presentation. When the truth is presented with sensitivity and love, couples respond positively.

PRESENTATION 5 :

The Joy of Sexual Honesty Within Marriage

This presentation examines sexual intercourse as a renewal of the wedding vows—spoken not with words, but with the “language of the body.” The goal is to help couples see the Church’s teaching for what it is: a path to authentic freedom and happiness. If couples have followed the logic of the program to this point, they are able to recognize for themselves the wisdom of the Church’s teaching on sexual morality. Special attention is given to the issue of responsible parenthood and the critical difference between contraception and Natural Family Planning. Once again, surveys have indicated a very positive response to this presentation.

PRESENTATION 6

(OPTIONAL — *Depending on the needs of the parish diocese*): Some Practical Benefits of Natural Family Planning

This shorter, closing presentation is designed to introduce couples to some of the many benefits of practicing Natural Family Planning. It does not instruct couples in how to use the method, but dispels various myths surrounding it and addresses initial questions about its use in marriage. The Church’s understanding of sexual intercourse as a renewal of marriage vows clarifies how a husband and wife who use Natural Family Planning strengthen their love and commitment to each other, to God, and to the virtues necessary for a joy-filled marriage.

God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage is available in Spanish.

We have also recorded a vibrant, live question-and-answer session that will further engage your couples and pastorally challenge them to consider the Catholic Church’s teaching on a host of teachings related to marriage and married life. This session can be used based on the particular needs and desires of your diocese or parish.



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