

For Better or Worse

The Vocation of Marriage

LIFE NIGHT OUTLINE

Goal for the Life Night

This Life Night will look at the vocation of Marriage as a unique calling from God designed to mirror Christ's love for the Church. The teens will understand that the grace of the Sacrament gives couples the ability to live holy, life-long Marriages. Finally, this night will look specifically at dating relationships as a foundation for discernment and Marriage preparation.

Life Night at a Glance

In today's culture, the sanctity and dignity of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is under attack. This Life Night will help teens understand that Holy Matrimony is created and sustained by God. The night opens with a fun cake-decorating competition within the small groups. The teaching for the night will focus on the centrality of Marriage in God's plan and Christ elevation of Marriage to a Sacrament. The Break will give teens an opportunity to interact with couples who are dating, engaged, or married. The couples will share their journey and offer practical advice on how to prepare for the Sacrament of Matrimony (even as teens). The Send of the night will give teens a time to pray for couples who are discerning Marriage, who are married and who are divorced or separated.

Environment

Every couple preparing to be married has to face a few big questions. One of those questions is "what will our cake look like?" The environment of this night will be based off of that question. Set up the room to look like a kitchen. Have a few metal tables with cooking utensils across the front. If your parish has a kitchen, borrow a few tall metal tray racks and place them behind the tables. On the tray racks, have enough baked, cooled and undecorated nine-inch round cakes to give one to every small group (these will be used in the Gather). If other equipment is available to use from the kitchen, use it. Be sure to return everything after the night is over. Create fake oven and appliance fronts out of butcher paper as an added effect to the space. Have items like flower, sugar, eggs, spices, and other cooking ingredients on the tables to fill out the environment. As an added bonus, have all the Core Members dress up like chefs and walk around with mixing bowls while greeting the teens. For the Break of the night, you will need four distinct locations for the teens to go to. Be creative in the use of your parish facilities to pull this off.

GATHER *15 Minutes*

Welcome and Introductions (5 min)

The youth minister should gather all the teens together, welcome everyone to the Life Night and split them into small groups. He/She should introduce any teens at Life Night for the first time.

Cake Decorating Contest (10 min)

The youth minister should explain that a local bakery contacted him/her about needing some extra help with the cake orders they received for this month. They need some people to design wedding cakes. The youth minister should tell the teens that the bakery has supplied cakes and supplies for each group to decorate a cake. To entice them even more, tell the teens that the bakery has offered prizes for the three best cakes voted by the youth minister. Give each small group one nine-inch round cake, a tub of icing, a knife, cake decorations like sprinkles, food coloring and a few plastic bags. The group will have 10 minutes to decorate a wedding cake. After time is up, the group will bring it forward and place it on the tables. The youth minister will judge the cakes and announce the winners at the end of the night.

PROCLAIM *10 minutes*

"I Do" Teaching (10 min)

The teaching for this night focus on a few main points: God's plan for Marriage, Marriage as a Sacrament and vocation, and how we prepare for this particular vocation. For this night, try to split the teaching up. Have different people or couples give the teaching. The youth minister should start the teaching by focusing first on Marriage beginning in the Garden of Eden, the nuptial orientation of salvation history (wedding themes throughout Scripture), and how Christ gave Marriage dignity by elevating it to a Sacrament. The rest of the teaching can be covered by the witness of the couples during the Break of the night.

The teaching can be found on pages 39-50.

CATECHISM REFERENCES:

1601-1666 #2399
 # 2331-2359
 # 2270-2274
 # 2353-2359
 #2370

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 1:28, 1:31, 2:4-25 Galatians 5:17
 Exodus 20:14
 Mark 10:6-8,11-12
 John 2:1-11
 Ephesians 5

BREAK *45 minutes***Rotating Sessions** (45 min)

The Break for this night will give the teens a better understanding at the stages of the Sacrament of Matrimony. This portion of the night will require four different couples—dating, engaged, married with young children, married with grown children (grandparents). Each will be “stationed” at a different location.

Break the teens into four evenly divided groups. The groups will then travel to one of the four locations. At each location, each couple will give a short story of how they met and then talk about how their different states are a unique part of the sacrament of marriage (see below). At the end of the sharing, give the teens an opportunity to ask questions. The teens should be at each station for approximately 10 minutes.

Dating:

The dating couple should focus on the need for chastity and practice the call to be a self-gift. They should also discuss that dating is a tool for discernment and give some practical advice for good dating habits in high school.

Engaged:

The engaged couple should focus on the need for good preparation and how engagement is still a time of discernment for the Sacrament of Matrimony. They should share how engagement is different than dating as well as practical tips on how to practice self-sacrifice now.

Married with young children:

The married with young children couple should focus on the vows of Marriage and how in Marriage husbands and wives are called to live those out everyday—to be a self-gift. They should focus on the goods of Marriage: faithful, indissoluble until death, and openness to children, as well as the call to chastity even within Marriage.

Married with grown children:

The married with grown children should focus on the fact that no matter how long a couple is married, they are going to need God’s grace to get through hard times. They should also discuss that all married couples, no matter how old or young are called to be a reflection of Christ’s love for the Church.

SEND *15 minutes***“A Glimpse Into Married Life” Video** (5 min)

Bring the entire group back together in the main meeting room. Use this video as a transition into the Send of the Life Night. The video will take the teens through a day in the life of one married couple and show how God is moving in their family and Marriage.

“A Glimpse Into Married Life” Video can be found on Video Support 8

Prayer for the Sacrament of Matrimony (10 min)

A few weeks before this Life Night, ask five teens to write prayers for this night. Give each teen one topic: dating couples, engaged couples, married couples, separated couples or divorced couples. Their prayers should pray for that specific group of people asking God to bless them and give them strength to seek Him at every moment, no matter their state. Set the room with a tone of prayer by dimming the lights. For this night, invite the music minister to be a part of the Send. He or she should play soft music in the background. The youth minister should open the time of prayer by thanking God for the gift of the Sacrament of Matrimony and its centrality in the life of the Church. After the youth minister is done, he/she should call forward the first teen to read their prayer. Once he/she is finished, the youth minister should play the chorus of the Matt Maher song “Unwavering” (found on his album entitled on “Empty and Beautiful.” Song books available at Lifeteen.com). Repeat this through all five prayers.

After the prayers are spoken, give the teens a few moments of silence to pray for their parents (whether married or not). The youth minister should close the time of prayer by asking for the intercession of Mary and Joseph, our perfect examples of holy Marriages. Close the night with the Hail Mary and Ave Maria.

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Making It Work

- If your group is small enough, keep everyone together for the four stations of the Break, rather than dividing them into four smaller groups.
- Many teens have very negative views of Marriage. Make sure the people presenting during this night are sensitive to the different situations of the teens.
- Serve the decorated cakes at the end of the Life Night as the snack. First have the youth minister announce the winning cakes.

Community Connection

- Invite 10 married couples to the Life Night to pray over the teens for their parents (whether married, divorced, or separated) as well as for their continual discernment and seeking God's plan for their life. This can be done as an alternative to the suggested Send.
- Have a Parent Life Night on the vocation of Marriage the same night as this night. Give the families discussion questions to take home and talk about.
- Ask parents, grandparents or other relatives of the teens to be the couples who share during the Break of the night.

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To the presenter: The teaching outlines given in this Curriculum Guide cover much more information than can be presented in a 10-minute talk. This is done on purpose. It is the role of presenter to be familiar with the topic and then prayerfully prepare the main points that will be presented to the teens. Use Scripture, Catechism and personal experience to convey the message.

What it is

“Marriage...is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.” In this excerpt from the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, we are introduced to a basic understanding of what marriage is to the Christian, what it involves, what it takes and how it is to be lived. Though direct, this part of the encyclical does not specifically answer the variety of questions facing Holy Matrimony today. Why can't married couples use birth control? Why can't married couples divorce if they don't love each other anymore? Why can't marriage be defined as two men or women (or whatever combination suits those “in love”)? What is the Church doing in the bedroom and since when does God have something to say about sex? This Life Night will answer that.

Humanae Vitae, 8

Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church—one of the unique ways in which God has allows His grace to be made manifest in this world through tangible, sensual experiences. Because it is a Sacrament, it means that at some point, Christ had something to do with its foundation. We'll get to that in a bit, but first, let's take a look at the earliest marriage in the Bible, that of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

In Genesis, God makes Adam out of the dust of the earth and breathes His life into him. The Lord said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him,” that is, God said: ‘I will make someone he can love.’ At first, God created animals for Adam but they were not suitable enough to be Adam's partner. Why? Because only Adam was made in the image and likeness of God. The animals were not. God then fashioned Eve from the

Genesis 2:4-25 (Second Creation Narrative)

Good News about Sex and Marriage, p. 22

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living body of Adam, which was animated by God's Holy Spirit and contained God's likeness, that is, some sort of communion with Him. Eve is the suitable partner for Adam because she is bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.

This union is described by our Lord as a one-flesh union. When questioned by the Pharisees on marriage, our Lord explains "at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one." Marriage existed in the Old Testament (and other cultures) but it was not the same institution as was established in Eden with Adam and Eve. Divorce and polygamy (multiple spouses at once) was a permissible custom. Jesus elevates marriage to its original status, as it was "in the beginning" in this moment in Scripture and reinstitutes the sacramental understanding—the sharing in God's likeness by means of the mutual love of the unity of husband and wife in their one flesh.

Marriage is something that runs throughout the Bible. Scripture opens with a story of the first marriage and culminates with the wedding feast of the Lamb in Revelation. Jesus' first miracle was even performed at a wedding! This stands as a clear "confirmation of the goodness of marriage."

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul describes the call of marriage and links the love of husband and wife (we will call this "nuptial" or "conjugal" love) to the love of God. He instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her. What many people don't realize is that this is what St. Paul also speaks of when he instructs wives to be subordinate to their husbands—*he's promoting the submission to a limitless love!* (Not so bad, huh?) St. Paul immediately follows up this decree with a reaffirmation of Christ's teaching of the one-flesh union of husband and wife.

Think about this: Christ so loved His Church that by His love we, the Church, the Bride of Christ, may have new life in the salvation bestowed upon us through the complete gift of His life and fidelity on the cross. This is the image of love that St. Paul calls married couples to live out in their mutual, complete, faithful and fruitful gift of their own lives—of their very selves—for the sake of their spouse's

Genesis 1:28

Mark 10:6-8

CCC 1614

CCC 1615

John 2:1-11

CCC 1613

Ephesians 5

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salvation. This is the basis of what the great Pope John Paul II describes as a Theology of the Body.

You may have heard of this before. Theology of the Body comes from 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II from September 1979 to November 1984. The first three parts of this catechetical lecture series deals primarily with Christian anthropology—our origins, our present state and our end—drawing from the richness of Church tradition as well as extending it. The last three parts deal with the questions of celibacy, marriage and the fruitful love of husband and wife. John Paul draws from Scripture, especially Genesis and Ephesians, to illustrate how human love is properly understood and expressed through our bodies. The conjugal love between a man and a woman bears the likeness of Christ's love for His bride, the Church, and the love between the persons of the Trinity. Something of God can be known by looking at the relationship between man and woman found in the beginning of time and in the true love found in the one-flesh union of Matrimony.

Explanation of Matrimony – What is the vocation?

Christian Marriage is a life-long commitment between a baptized man and a baptized woman as husband and wife designed to reflect the unending love that God has for his people, individually and collectively; a covenant of love.” As in every vocation from the Lord, a person is called to know and to love God better. In Marriage (and the family), Christ's saving work is carried out by virtue of the sacramental covenant between husband and wife in their nuptial love.

CCC 1625

The Church recognizes the world in which we live today, a world of increased personal freedom and interconnected relationships. Marriage is compatible with these trends, but remember that these freedoms and relationships are social. The moral principles of marriage do not change. They are true, and that which is true is always true.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them “very good”—the crown jewel of creation. After every plant and animal, earth and sea, and stars in heaven above, husband and wife were the only creatures who stood in the image and likeness of the Almighty Creator. This likeness is a shared dignity of both the man and the woman. Married couples share in the love of God, which supports and sustains them. By their faithfulness to one

Genesis 1:31

CCC 1648

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another and to God, they can be witnesses to God's fruitful love.

"This fruitful love is best seen in children. Children are the fruit of marriage. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves." Did you realize that man is the only creature who has the power to create another living and eternal soul? This is what happens when a child is conceived. Let's take this seriously for a second. If a human being is created in the image and likeness of our Lord and has the capacity to love as Christ loves His Bride, what would the best place to raise and foster a human life through the early stages of their life? Ideally, the situation that would best suit a person's development, education and spiritual formation is in the context of a family—surrounded by the faithful and fruitful love of husband and wife. Parents are the principal educators of their children. How many more useful things have your parents taught you than you learned in all your years of school? This also can apply to extended family, beyond a child's biological parents.

CCC 1652
Gaudium et Spes, 50

CCC 1652-1654

Mutual self-giving within Marriage and family serves as basis for responsible activity in society and in the Church. It was in your family that you first learned right from wrong. The first place you experienced what it was like to live within a community was in a family. It is where you learn to pray, to play, to share; you learn how to help others and how to love others even when it's not easy. You learn your role in the family that will lead you to develop an idea of what your vocation is in life. This is a good thing.

The vocational fidelity found in the conjugal love of husband and wife is under attack. Infidelity is the sin that is found at the root of the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Why not? Because God's love is always faithful! So should ours be. Fidelity is tempted easily. Adam and Eve's infidelity to God's law caused them to sin and fall from grace. Today, fidelity is threatened by pornography, masturbation, lust, sex outside of marriage, rape and prostitution. In all of these ways, a person is unfaithful to their (perhaps future) spouse, to God or to both. The mind and heart is perverted and polluted—deprived of what it means to freely and fully give one's self—and in all these cases, turns another person into an object used for another's gratification.

Exodus 20:14

CCC 2351-2356

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What should be sought to counter this threat is the virtue of **chastity**. Many times we may think chastity means, “don’t have sex!” when that may only be a portion of what it means to be chaste. Chastity is the proper exercise of sexuality depending on a person’s present state of life. It’s a virtue; a good habit fueled by grace. It’s a virtue that helps you to not use people, especially in regards to sexuality. Chastity is what helps those who are single to remain free from adulterous activity so as not to make an object out of another person. It is also chastity that enables husbands and wives to *have sex without using each other for sex*.

CCC 2337-2345

Unfortunately and all too often, problems in families spring from “a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God’s plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one’s own selfish well-being,” which is contrary to God’s love. Spouses are not in competition with one another. Children should not feel oppressed by their parents. I know that sometimes it may seem as though there is no reasonable explanation for the way that parents act, the rules they make or what they think is socially beneficial for their children, but God calls us to love and to be obedient to our present state of life. Ideally, husband and wife love and support each other. With God’s grace, parents and children will grow in love for each other. The family is the domestic church, as John Paul II calls it. It is the smallest unit of society, a microcosm of the entire human community, and should never be a place of selfishness or degradation. With God’s help and grace, man and woman can live according to the original plan for Marriage.

Familiaris Consortio, 6

CCC 1606

CCC 1607

When the roles of man and woman are distorted, a multitude of problems enter the picture. Everyone is called to be open to life because human life is sacred. This is especially true in the actions of husband and wife, specifically in sex. Let’s face it; you are here today because two people had sex. It is an amazing gift from the Lord. From the intimate marital embrace of husband and wife, God brings new life into His creation.

CCC 1608

CCC 2270 – 2274

Sometimes couples are not open to a new life for various reasons. Some of these reasons may be completely valid. For example, a couple may not be able to financially support a child. In such cases, couples should abstain

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from sex. Some couples decide to prevent new life by means of external actions such as artificial birth control or sterilization. Utilizing one of these forms of birth control is *contraceptive*, that is, destructive and contrary to life. Sex is wonderful, but it cannot be separated from the procreative aspect of the act. An artificial attempt to “block” fertilization or alter natural biological function in a way that is contrary to life is at the same time, by definition, aligned with death. This makes it a grave offense. Abortion goes beyond the mere blocking of the opportunity for new life. Abortion destroys a created human life. This should never be tolerated. Such an attitude is poisonous in the context of marriage and the family.

CCC 2370

CCC 2399

Other things devalue the meaning of marriage and the original plan of God set forth in Eden, such as cohabitation of unmarried couples and homosexual unions. God wants everyone to love and be loved, but there is a proper way to do so. This is because of its free, total, faithful, and fruitful nature in the one-flesh union of conjugal love. Husband and wife are *complimentary* in their bearing of the image of God.

Because one of the results of sex is new life and because a couple “living together” as though they were married is not the place in which children are best suited to be raised, sex outside of marriage violates the dignity of the human person. It shortchanges the potential child and takes advantage of the members of the relationship.

CCC 2353

Homosexual unions are contrary to life and misuse the other’s sexuality for mutual self-gratification. Homosexuals cannot be married, not because the Church doesn’t recognize that any two people can “love” each other to a great extent, but because marriage must be a total, faithful and fruitful union. Homosexuals cannot enter into a fruitful union. The fruit of marriage is the ability to bring new life into the world. There is disorder in the relationship.

CCC 2357

Homosexuals should nevertheless be “accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided... Homosexual persons are called to chastity.”

CCC 2358

Ever since the legalization of abortion and widespread acceptance of contraceptive methods, divorces have increased. In some places the divorce rate is reported to be approaching 70 percent. The Church realizes that there

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are situations in which living together as husband and wife becomes increasingly difficult. In such occasions, physical separation is permissible. The couple is not free to enter into another marital union because they are already bound to another. The Church encourages reconciliation between the spouses. There is always hope.

CCC 1649

Our Lord tells us that, “whoever divorces and marries another commits adultery.” The one-flesh union of husband and wife cannot be dissolved except in death. Someone who divorces civilly is still married to his/her spouse even though it’s not recognized by the state. Thus, any sexual relations are unfaithful and adulterous.

Mark 10:11-12

CCC1650

Couples may divorce because of reasons that have to do with falling “out of love” or some variation thereof, as if love was a good feeling that evaporated over time and therefore the marriage did as well. The love of husband and wife is like the love of Christ and His Church. It was not because of a “good feeling” that Christ got up on the cross. It was not because of a “good feeling” that saints gave their lives for their Lord and Savior. Love is a decision to serve and sacrifice for another. Not loving someone is not enough to d

Let’s get married

For those whom the Lord calls to enter into the sacred bonds of Marriage, there is, of course, a way to begin this new life with their spouse. Because marriage is a publicly recognized status in the Church, it’s fitting that a public, liturgical celebration commemorates the beginning of the new sacramental life. In the Latin Church (Roman Catholic), this takes place during a nuptial Mass. It is also appropriate for the bride and groom to present themselves to the Lord and ask for forgiveness prior to their wedding in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

CCC 1621

CCC 1622

The ministers for the Sacrament are the spouses. The husband confers the Sacrament upon his wife and the wife upon the husband. They are the ministers of God’s grace and make Marriage a Sacramental vocation. It usually happens that a minister of the Church is present at the ceremony to stand as witness on behalf of the community for the Sacrament to be valid. In the Eastern Churches, the bishop or priest confers the Sacrament of Matrimony.

CCC 1623

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The three essential promises made by the spouses are **fidelity, indissolubility** and **openness to children**, “By its very nature, marriage demands faithfulness of heart, mind, and action to your one and only spouse.” This is true fidelity. When you say, “I do,” you are promising to give the entirety of your personhood over for the service of your beloved. Indissolubility is the permanent aspect of Marriage, “If this isn’t what bride and groom intend to establish, then they don’t intend to establish a marriage. Marriage is all or nothing.”

Openness to children is deeply rooted in the very nature of marriage. This does not mean that couples **MUST** have children for their marriage to be valid. There are many cases in which a couple is unable to conceive a child. This in no way invalidates their love, fidelity and the completeness of their one-flesh union. However, to intentionally avoid having children is contrary to the vocation.

In the Latin Church, the Nuptial Mass is the proper place for the marriage ceremony. If the marriage is between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, the ceremony can take place outside the Eucharistic context. With permission from a bishop, the Eucharistic Liturgy may take place with the understanding among non-Catholics present that they may not receive the Eucharist, as is the normal custom for non-Catholics who attend ordinary Mass.

Catholics are encouraged to marry other Catholics. Practically speaking, one’s faith is something that entails deeply rooted convictions about life, truth and God. It is beneficial for both husband and wife if they are in communion in regards to faith for their own mutual support as well as that of their children. “Mixed-marriages” are allowed within the Church. In such cases, ecclesial authority provides consent needed to approve the Sacrament. The Marriage is only sacramental in the case that the non-Catholic spouse agrees that the children are to be raised according to the Catholic faith.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to prepare for marriage as you would prepare to enter into any other Sacrament, “Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main stages: **remote, proximate** and **immediate preparation**.”

The Good News of Sex and Marriage, 53

Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, 159

CCC 1633-1637

CCC 1622

Familiaris Consortio, 66.3

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"Remote preparation begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves, in relation to their surrounding society, their interior life, and their relationship with God." That's right—you begin preparing for marriage as a child! You may remember following mom or dad around during their work around the house and trying to help and be like them. This is how we learn what it is that moms and dads, husbands and wives, do.

Familiaris Consortio, 66.4

Following this, we learn of a "proximate" preparation period, in which a teen or young adult rediscovers an admiration for the Sacrament in light of mature catechesis and formation in their faith. No longer do they see marriage through the eyes of a child. They are more ready to experience the greatness of the Sacrament as a young person and is able to understand what the relationship of husband and wife entails, "This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions." This knowledge also entails a healthy self-understanding of sexuality. Sexuality is part of a persons' very being. Though at times we may feel like anything sexually related may be the flesh waging war on our holy intentions, as St. Paul mentions, we must be assured that our sexuality is not intended to be disconnected from who we are. We are created as an eternal soul united to our bodies in a complete way. Our bodies are as much of who we are as our souls are. This is good. This is God's gift to us and is what enables us to love with our bodies. We relate through a personhood that includes sexuality. We must have a proper understand of this in order to operate correctly in our vocation.

Familiaris Consortio, 66.5

Galatians 5:17

Summa Theologica, 1, Q.76, a.8

"The immediate preparation for the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding." This is the homestretch! This is the stage of planning that is greatly connected with the future spouse. All other preparation is formational development of the individual so that he/she may be properly disposed to make a complete self-gift. This final stage is rich in discernment.

Familiaris Consortio, 66.7

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If we next look at the Marriage between man and woman, we will see the complete compatibility and interconnectedness in the complementary relationship between husband and wife. As St. Paul explains in Ephesians, husband and wife have separate roles and are present for the mutual building up of the other, “Husband and wife are, in fact, ‘subject to one another,’ mutually subordinated to one another. The *source* of this reciprocal submission lies in the Christian *pietas* [duty] and *its expression is love.*”

CCC 2333

Theology of the Body 89.3

It is in this context of marriage and within the reciprocal and complementary love that sexual intimacy is reserved. The love of husband and wife is not only manifest in sex, “Sexual relations between them can only be the expression of a unification already complete.” Sex affirms that faithful, permanent and fruitful promises have already been made! Sex outside of marriage denies all of these things. Sexual intimacy is at home within the context of marriage. It’s the expression that united Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Love and Responsibility II, 2.3

You may be confused at this point in thinking that sex is only for bringing new life into the world. If this were true, couples who were physically unable to have children would never be allowed to have sex, and that is not the case. It is permissible to regulate procreation by means of self-observation of fertile periods and abstinence in order to plan births. This is known as Natural Family Planning or NFP. NFP is not intended to allow couples to selfishly have sex when they have a hunch that pregnancy would be difficult. The mutual respect and selflessness is always required in every act of marriage.

CCC 2367-2372

Now in the immediate preparation for marriage, the Church provides education for engaged couples at the parish and diocesan level. Classes are often offered that focus on the couples’ promises, grow in knowledge of self, their future spouse and of their relationship. Classes also teach practical skills to help couples live what they promise, such as more detailed NFP instructions.

The Sacramental Effects

All Sacraments bestow grace upon their recipients. Marriage is no different. Along with this grace, “from a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and,

CCC 1638

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as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a *special sacrament*.”

Married couples are given the grace to love unselfishly, and because of Christ’s restoration of marriage to the original plan, strengthens the love of the spouses through His grace and forges a stronger bond and union in joy. This renewed purpose of marriage is what makes it salvific. For the Christian, the goal of marriage is entirely Christocentric, concerned with salvation and eternal life. In a way, marriage is a preparation for death! Parents are called to raise their children in faith and love. Grace gives them the strength to accomplish this task. Married couples are also called to be a witness to Christ’s love in their community.

CCC 1615

CCC 1617, 1639, 1641

CCC 1652-1654

CCC 1655-1658

Marriage’s place in high school

As a high-school teen, dating can seem like a big deal. There are many pressures to live up to what your friends, TV, and movies tell you that you’re “supposed to do” in a relationship. Sex in highschool will not lead you to the free, total, faithful and fruitful joys of a marriage. Now, this isn’t only true of sex, but sexual activity in all forms—oral and anal sex, fondling, heavy make-out sessions—anything that leads to a lustful arousal is contrary to your vocation as a high school teen—your vocation to *chastity*. Chastity will enable you to fully and freely give yourself when the time is right (in marriage). Also, the person that you are sexually active with may be someone else’s future spouse. This is another reason to act chastely. It’s hard to control your desires, especially in high-school and especially in the midst of the sexually saturated culture we live in. With God’s grace, we can persevere in holiness. The virtue of chastity and the habit of self-control is beneficial in marriage too. A high school teen should be aware of what it is dating is meant for— preparation for marriage!

Does that mean that you shouldn’t date unless you’re ready to get married? It depends on what you feel dating should entail. If you believe that dating is when two people do everything with another person because they are attached at the hip, then you probably shouldn’t ever date anyone. If you think dating is used as a means to “explore” another person physically and hopefully have them “explore” you, you’re probably better off not dating. If dating is something that you think you’re ready for

For Better or Worse

The Vocation of Marriage

CHECKLIST

Core Planning Team:

Date of Life Night:

One month prior to the Night:

Give copies of the Life Night to each of the members of the planning team. Each person should read the Scripture and Catechism references as well as review the planning guide before the brainstorming meeting.

Get the planning team together for a brainstorming meeting (this should last no longer than 1 hour). The team prays and discusses where the teens are in their faith journey in relation to this topic. Then using this planning guide as a starting point, the team adapts the Life Night to meet the needs of the teens and the parish. Create a detailed outline with any changes and/or adjustments.

Assign the person responsible for each part of the Life Night:

Environment _____

Introductions _____

Cake Decorating Contest _____

Rotating Sessions _____

Prayer for the Sacrament of Matrimony

Two Weeks Prior to Life Night:

Turn in a detailed outline of the Life Night to the youth minister. Allow the youth minister to give feedback and

make any necessary changes.

Create a list of needed supplies and materials. Assign a person to be responsible for collecting and/or purchasing the materials needed.

Decide the people that will be doing the following things. Make sure they have a copy of the script and/or teaching outline. Inform them of any practices and/or deadlines.

Teaching _____

Rotating Sessions:

Dating couple _____

Engaged couple _____

Married with young children _____

Married with grown children _____

Week of the Life Night:

Written outline of the teaching is given to the youth minister and practiced.

Run a dress rehearsal of the Life Night. Youth minister gives feedback.

Create environment and collect needed supplies.

Email entire Core team an overview of the night.

Day of the Life Night:

Set up the environment. Make sure the room is clean and presentable.

Set up audio and video. Test the video clips to make sure both picture and sound work.

Walk the entire Core team through the Life Night. Make sure all transitions are ready and everyone knows their roles.

Pray! Pray for the teens attending the Night. Pray for God's will to be done through the night. Pray over those involved.