

Soul Mates for Life

SESSION SIX



Prayer

Lord,

*You call married couples to be
a living sign of your love.*

*Make our love for each other
be like your love for us;
passionate, permanent, intimate,
unconditional and life giving.*

*May we be as present to each other
as you are to us so that all your people
can see your presence
manifested in our tender love for one another.
Through Jesus, our Lord, Amen.*



Reflect: **SPIRITUALITY**

1. What is your understanding of God? Is God for you a 'person' or a 'force' or something else?

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2. How do you see your spirituality influencing the way you live?

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3. How would you describe your religious practice? (e.g. go to church, pray, read scripture etc.)

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Concept: **SACRAMENT**

Matrimony is more than a private relationship.
It is a Sacrament: A living sign of God's love.



Activity: SOUL MATES

When you come together before the Lord on your wedding day, it will mark the beginning of a new relationship with God. In the Father's eyes, you are no longer two, but one body. Each time you come together before the Lord in prayer you will continue that journey of becoming one in mind, heart and affection.

Sharing your personal relationship with God with each other is a kind of 'spiritual nakedness' that is powerfully bonding and can help you to experience God's presence in your marriage in an exciting way.



BECOMING Soul Mates

1. Do you pray? When, how and why do you pray?

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2. To whom do you pray most often?

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3. What is your image of God?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loving father | <input type="checkbox"/> Harsh judge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distant, benevolent creator | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurturing mother |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intimate friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Other? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal saviour | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impersonal force | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. On the scale, indicate where you see yourself in your relationship with God.

0.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10
Distant Close

How do you **feel** about your answer?

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I feel close to God when....

The experience that most convinces me that there is a God is....

One memory about my faith that I cherish is...

The things about my faith family, religion or faith tradition that I most value are....

The faith experiences that I most want to share with you are...

The faith experiences that I most want to share with our children are...

My experience of the role of Mary and the saints is...

A great way to begin to share faith with each other is to write a sincere prayer for your marriage. Make your prayer one which expresses all the longing in your hearts for each other and your future together. If you feel uncomfortable addressing your prayer to God, you can make this a reflection of your vision for your marriage.



A PRAYER FOR OUR Marriage

SPIRITUAL Intimacy

CONNECT

1. **Unclutter:** Come together with a Connect Kiss or a Connect Hug.
2. **Emotional Communion:** take turns to share what you have written with your fiancé and unite with their heart. Read your prayer to each other.
3. **At Home - Pray it!** Write your prayer up on a nice card and consider the following ways of 'praying it':
 - Include all, or some portion of, your prayer in your wedding programme, as part of your rehearsal dinner or in your wedding speech.
 - Recite your prayer each night between now and the wedding to keep you spiritually attuned to each other.
 - Keep your prayer to pray throughout your marriage, especially on your wedding anniversary.

All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. John 15:11-12



At Home: SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Use the L.I.F.E. framework to answer the following questions over the coming weeks:

1. How do you feel when you go to Mass (or other religious service) together?
2. The Church calls you to be a 'Sacrament' - a living sign of Christ's love for the Church. How do you feel about that?
3. How do you feel when your fiancé shares his/her faith with you?
4. What is your strongest emotion when you think about God?
5. How do you feel about raising your children as Catholics?



THE Fine Print

It's always a good idea to read the fine print before you sign on the dotted line and marriage in the Catholic Church is no different. Catholic Marriage is more than just a venue for a wedding service. Catholic Marriage has specific obligations and you need to be aware of these in order to make a free and informed commitment on your wedding day.

1. **THE PERMANENCY OF MARRIAGE.**

As marriage is a Sacrament that witnesses to God's permanent, faithful love, divorce is not possible for a valid Catholic marriage. Even if the marriage has been legally terminated, the couple is still considered to be married in the eyes of the Church. Couples who are civilly divorced can apply to the Church for an annulment, which is a declaration, after investigation, that the marriage was invalid; that is, from the beginning the marriage didn't meet the requirements of a Sacramental bond.

2. **THE FREEDOM TO MARRY.** If either of the parties to this marriage have been previously married they are unable to have a Catholic wedding unless the previous marriage is annulled. The Catholic Church recognises marriages conducted in other Christian Churches or Christian communities.

3. **SEXUAL INTIMACY.** Sexual intercourse is the sacred gesture that consummates a marriage and is an essential part of sacramental marriage. While some couples due to disability may have difficulty in this regard, the **intent** to be sexually intimate is considered essential.

4. **SEXUAL EXCLUSIVITY.** Sexual exclusivity is considered foundational to a Catholic Marriage and the wedding rings are explicitly noted as a "sign of love and fidelity". As Jesus himself defined adultery as 'even lusting after another' [Mt 5:28], sexual exclusivity includes the rejection of pornography.

5. **UNCONDITIONAL SHARING.** When a couple marries in the Catholic Church their material assets become shared property. Similarly both husband and wife are expected to share the responsibilities of a common life, especially the raising of children and the care of each other during times of illness. Prenuptial agreements are thus considered incompatible with Catholic marriages except in rare circumstances.

6. **OPENNESS TO CHILDREN.** On your wedding day, you will be asked if you will "accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church". All Catholic marriages are expected to be open to having children, except in the case of mature couples past the age of childbearing. This presumes that couples will plan their families according to the principles of 'conscious parenthood' (see session 5, extension activity) and will reject the use of contraception, sterilisation and abortion.
7. **RAISING CHILDREN CATHOLIC.** If you are not Catholic but are marrying a Catholic then, you are not responsible for raising your children in the Catholic faith, but you are committing to support your Catholic spouse's obligation to do this.

Clearly, not all couples in Catholic marriages fulfil all these requirements perfectly. Although the Church has high ambitions for us, yearning for each of us to have the fullness of life as promised by Christ, she does not demand perfection from us. She holds out these foundations of Catholic marriage as an invitation to deeper faith, greater love and more fulfilled living.

In choosing to marry in the Catholic Church you are committing to strive to live your married life according to the vision of the Church. It's a vision that will extend you and will lead you and your marriage towards deeper intimacy and love, but it is a vision that you must freely choose for yourselves.



At Home: **DISCUSS**

1. The Church calls you to be a Sacrament – a living sign of Christ's love for his people. How do you feel about that? (L.I.F.E.)
2. Looking at the points above, what reservations do you have about undertaking a Catholic Marriage?
3. What questions do you have about Catholic Marriage that you would like answered by your priest?

THE WEDDING Ceremony



At Home: WEDDING VOWS

During your wedding, you will speak vows of permanent commitment to each other. You will most likely use one of the standard forms shown below.

Select the form you prefer. Take each phrase and write what it means to you and how you intend to live it out.

For example, "I, take you to be my wife."- I accept you completely with all your wonderful qualities and with all your flaws. I will love you even when you disappoint me or hurt me. I take you to my heart and promise to protect you.

VERSION 1

***I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband.
I promise to be true to you
in good times and in bad,
in sickness and in health,
I will love you and honour you
all the days of my life.***

VERSION 2

***I, N., take you, N., for my lawful wife/
husband,
to have and to hold,
from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
until death do us part.***

Be sure to include all of the sentiments behind these words and everything that these vows will mean to you personally, so that they may have the richest meaning when you speak them and hear them spoken to you on your wedding day.



At Home: WEDDING LITURGY

In order to make your wedding ceremony personal and meaningful, you will need to select some prayers and scripture readings.

Traditionally, these readings include:

- First Reading from the Old Testament
- Responsorial Psalm which may be sung or read
- Second Reading from the New Testament
- Gospel Reading from one of the Gospels

If you prefer you can omit the Second Reading, in which case the First Reading can be from either the Old or New Testaments.

There are a large number of suitable readings and prayer choices. Should you wish to use readings or prayers that are not part of the Church's liturgical selection, you will need to discuss it with your priest.

The **Rite of Marriage** (including the Statement of Intentions, Consent and Exchange of Rings) are sacred words forming the foundation of the Sacrament and cannot be changed, although there are some options within them.

All Catholic weddings have a **Liturgy of the Word** and the **Rite of Marriage**. Some also have a **Liturgy of the Eucharist** (called a **Nuptial Mass**). You will need to discuss with your priest whether or not you will have a Nuptial Mass. Generally, if either the bride or groom are not Catholic, the couple will opt **not** to have a Nuptial Mass.

These, and other prayers, can be viewed on the website, together with suggestions to prepare a wedding booklet. Use the form on the following page to record your choices so that you can discuss them with your priest.

For Resources on Planning your Wedding Ceremony, visit the member hub:

www.SmartLoving.org/Engaged/Member

Wedding Ceremony

PLANNER

Entrance Procession

Participants (tick as many as apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Priest(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Priest with altar servers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flower Girl | <input type="checkbox"/> Ring bearer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridesmaids alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridesmaids w/Groomsmen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Groom alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Groom with Parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bride alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Bride with Father |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bride with Parents | <input type="checkbox"/> Bride & Groom together |

Music:

1.....

Liturgy of the Word

Opening Prayer (choose 1 - Read by the priest/deacon)

First Reading (choose 1 - Old Testament)

Read by:

Responsorial Psalm (choose 1)

☐ Read or ☐ Sung by:

Second Reading (choose 1 - New Testament)

Read by:

Gospel Acclamation (choose 1)

☐ Read or ☐ Sung by:

Gospel (choose 1 - Read by the priest/deacon)

Rite of Marriage

Exchange of Consent/Wedding vows (choose 1)

☐ Memorised ☐ Read ☐ Recited after the priest/deacon

Blessing of Rings (choose 1)

Prayer of the Couple (optional)

Prayers of the Faithful

Response: ☐ Spoken ☐ Sung

Read by:

Nuptial Blessing...or

Nuptial Blessing (choose 1)

... Nuptial Mass

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST (OPTIONAL)

Presentation of the Gifts (bread, wine, water)

Brought forward by:

Additional symbolic gifts (optional)

Music:

Prayer over the Gifts (choose 1)

Preface (choose 1)

Nuptial Blessing (choose 1)

Sign of Peace

Communion - who in the wedding party will receive communion?

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bride | <input type="checkbox"/> Groom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maid of Honour | <input type="checkbox"/> Best Man |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under both kinds | <input type="checkbox"/> Bread only |

Music

Concluding Rites

Final Blessing (choose 1)

Signing of the Register Music:

Recessional Music

Other Special Elements (e.g. wedding candle, blessing of hands, wedding crucifix)

Friends

TO CALL ON

COUPLE Prayer



Activity: **MARITAL FITNESS PLAN**

Challenges can confront our marriages at any time, often when we least expect it. Just like our general health where the greater our underlying fitness the better we can fight and recover from unexpected illness and injury, so too for our marriage. The healthier our relationship the better we can recover from the inevitable challenges we may face.

Like a physical fitness program, a 'marital fitness plan' is a proactive way to avoid problems and recover more quickly from them when they occur. Many of the SmartLoving Tools you have learnt throughout the course can be used as part of your marital fitness plan.

CONNECTION RITUALS:

I would like to adopt the following as regular habits...

- ☐ Daily Appreciation
- ☐ Daily Strongest Emotion (L.I.F.E.)
- ☐ Time Out to ask 'Why?'
- ☐ Stop Reflect Connect
- ☐ Connect Hug
- ☐ Connect Kiss
- ☐ Natural Fertility Management
- ☐ Couple Prayer
- ☐ Other (eg. Date Night)

ONGOING FORMATION:

Areas where I would like to get more education/formation are:

- ☐ Understanding Family of Origin influences
- ☐ Handling conflict and anger
- ☐ Treating addictions and/or mental illness
- ☐ Improving communication
- ☐ Dealing with sexual problems
- ☐ Fertility education/treatment
- ☐ Parenting education
- ☐ Learning about becoming a Catholic
- ☐ Healing for past hurts
- ☐ Other:

How often would I like us to participate in relationship enrichment? (eg monthly, once a year, once every two years).

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Our next enrichment is planned:

Name of course

Approximate date

SUPPORT: TO WHOM COULD WE GO FOR HELP?

Support people (friends, family, colleagues, organisations)

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Tool: **EVENING PRAYER**

Begin to pray together every day or at least once a week. Pick a specific time, and if not sure how to pray, use the following format.

1. **Hold hands** and rest quietly for a minute to become aware of God's presence.
2. **Share:** how you have felt loved by your fiancé today?
3. **Pray:** Together say the prayer.

Lord God,

*We praise you for the gift of the other,
and we thank you for the blessings
we have had through our relationship.*

*Forgive us for the times
that we have failed
to love the way we should.*

*Help us to do better in bringing
your love and acceptance to each other.
Amen.*

NB: You can also pray this prayer individually.