



ONLINE

Celebrant Guide to the Course Report

At the end of the course, couples complete an online assessment consisting of mostly short answer questions. Both fiancés write their own answers to the majority of these, with a selection of questions they answer jointly. Their answers are then assembled into a PDF document that includes their certificate and their responses to the lesson questions.

As the Celebrant (or supervisor if the couple is marrying overseas or interstate), this report gives you the opportunity to interact with the couple at a meaningful level. If you are short on time, we suggest that at the minimum you look at their answers to **Lessons 5 and 8**. If you are able to spend more time with them, we provide the following summaries and commentaries for each lesson to guide your discussions.

Francine & Byron Pirola

Sample Certificate



Engaged Online Completion Certificate

Awarded to:

John Smith and Jane Doe

Course Completion Date: 11/10/2017

Time Spent in the Course: 11:53:21

Wedding Details: 29/12/2017 | Derry, Ireland

Celebrant: Fr O'Shea

Supervisor: Fr Sherlock Holmes | **Diocese:** Sydney | **Email:** frsherlock@gmail.com

Religion: Catholic (His) | Anglican (Her)

Mentor Accompanied? Yes | Ken & Barbie Mattel

Janani & Byron Rivola

Directors, Marriage Resource Centre

Course Overview

1. A Mission to Love: Learning how to love effectively, the power of affirmation.
2. Dialogue: Effective communication for establishing empathy.
3. Knowing Me, Knowing You: Family of Origin influences, forgiveness.
4. Building Unity: Managing Differences and making couple decisions.
5. Restoring Unity: Conflict and Reconciliation.
6. Sex - Sacred Embrace: The Theology of Sex, maintaining romance.
7. Love Gives Life: Fertility Awareness and conscious parenthood.
8. A Living Sign: The Sacrament of Marriage, confronting marriage saboteurs.
9. Soul Mates for Life: Spiritual intimacy, couple prayer, wedding liturgy.

***Time Spent in the Course:** A minimum of 1 hour active in the platform is required to progress from each lesson (a total of 9 hours). Expected time for a couple who has been fully participating is 11 or more hours (keeping in mind that the timer doesn't record time spent in discussion).

Questions answered individually (by him and her)

Lesson 1: Mission to Love

Unpacking Love

Summary of Content

- Approach your marriage as a mission to convince the other that they are loved and loveable.
- If we make marriage our mission, we are more likely to succeed. Challenges couples to prioritise their marriage.
- Sexual differences are a gift. Men and women relate differently, and these differences are not a problem, they are complementary.
- Love is a choice to make a gift of ourselves to each other. It's not just a feeling.
- Unique Love Profile – everyone has a unique pattern of love needs comprised of Love Builders and Love Busters.
- Affirmation is a powerful way to strengthen the relationship, express acceptance and communicate our love needs.
- Key Concept: Smart Loving.
- Connection Ritual: Daily Appreciation (practice for homework).

Assessment & Comment

1: In your own words, how would you describe the concept of SmartLoving?

Ideal answer: *Smart Loving* is loving the other in the way that he/she most likes and needs to be loved. It's loving the other on their terms, according to their unique love profile.

Look for evidence that both fiancés have understood the idea that love is an active choice to act for the good of the other. It is not just a feeling; it is a decision.

Supplementary Questions

1. We all experience love differently. What did you discover about the way you each experience love?
 2. What is one Love Builder, and one Love Buster your fiancé has?
 3. When you marry in the Catholic church, you accept a mission to be a messenger of God's love to the other. How do you feel about taking on this mission?
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Lesson 2: Dialogue

Verbal Communication skills

Summary of Content

- There are different levels of intimacy at which we can communicate: cliché, facts, opinion, emotions, needs.
- Emotions and needs are unique and deeply personal.
- Key Concept: Intimate communication occurs at the levels of emotions and needs. Emotions are symptoms of our needs, are unique to each person and give us a window into our deepest needs and spiritual desires.
- The willingness to be emotionally naked creates a deep communion between husband and wife.
- Expressing ourselves clearly requires us to reflect on our inner emotions and needs.
- Listening for true understanding requires us to be open to experiencing the emotional world of the other (empathy).
- Key Concept: Emotional Communion is a profound connection with the other.
- Sexual differences in communication.
- Connection Ritual: Daily Strongest Emotion (practice for homework).
- Tool: L.I.F.E. for communication.

Assessment & Comment

2: What is the most significant thing you learnt about effective communication from this course?

No ideal answer: personal question

Look for evidence that both fiancés have appreciated that there is a discipline to good communication, especially that listening requires self-restraint. If they have done the activities, they should be full of enthusiasm for new-found discoveries in themselves and in each other.

Supplementary Questions:

1. What was the experience like to be truly and deeply listened to by your fiancé? What impact did it have on your relationship?
 2. What do you find hardest about communicating at a deep level?
 3. Prayer is simply communication with God. Having learnt to communicate better with your fiancé, how can you apply the principles of communication to your prayer life?
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Lesson 3: Knowing Me, Knowing You

Exploring Family of Origin

Summary of Content

- We cannot fully know the other without also knowing the family from which they originated.
- We first learnt about marriage in our families.
- Our early experiences are profoundly influential in forming our attitudes, expectations and behaviours.
- Adopted formation is the unconscious learnt behaviour we accepted without noticing.
- Rejected formation happens when we have a power negative reaction to a formation experience that leads us to act in the extreme opposite way.
- By learning to be intentional about the formation we wish to adopt or reject we can take active management of our life and relationships.
- In order to tame our formation, we need to name it: Incompatible expectations, Compatible but suboptimal patterns, Emotional injuries.
- Tool: Time Out to ask 'Why?' (Manage your reactions by asking: why am I reacting this way? where is this coming from?)
- Key Concept: Forgiveness brings freedom. It is a choice to let go of our resentment against the other. Forgiveness frees us to move on from emotional injuries

Assessment & Comment

3: In your own words: Describe why forgiveness is important and how failing to forgive can negatively impact a marriage.

Ideal answer: Forgiveness is a choice to let go of resentment towards someone who has hurt me. When I fail to forgive, it keeps me locked in resentment and bitterness which influences my behaviour negatively in my relationships, especially my marriage.

Look for evidence that they have completed the formation inventory. It is a rich experience that provides liberating insights into their patterns of behaviour. It is also likely to bring up childhood frustrations and unresolved emotional injuries.

Supplementary questions

1. Did looking at your childhood experiences bring up any issues for you, any pain or suffering?
2. Would you like to talk about that or get help from someone to process that?

NB: Extension Activities include an exercise for 'Healing Emotional Injuries'. However some situations of severe trauma may require referral to professional services.

Lesson 4: Building Unity

Couple Decision Making

Summary of Content

- Concept: An **ideal** is something we believe is important, but it may not be active in our life. A **priority** is something into which we invest time, money or energy and has an active presence in our life. Internal conflict arises when our ideals and priorities are not aligned.
- Behind every behaviour or preference, we have is a **value**. Disagreements between people happen when we have conflicting values.
- When we honour the other's values, they feel loved and important.
- Key Concept: The most important value for us as a couple is our unity. All decisions should be measured against how well it advances our unity.
- Tool: Stop-Reflect-Connect (Couple Decision Making)

Assessment & Comment

4: Explain why Values Based Decision Making helps couples make decisions that always bring them closer together (as compared to other common decision-making strategies).

Ideal Answer: Behind every preference we have is a value, something that meets an important need. When we make a decision based on our values, we are able to make a choice that honours both values and meets important needs in each of us. The most important value is our unity. Many other strategies require one or the other of us to compromise our values or puts individual desires ahead of our unity as a couple.

Look for evidence that the couple has understood the need to make their unity the priority value in all their decision making. The wedding will be presenting them with many opportunities to make good decisions, or bad ones. Encourage them to make every decision one that brings them closer, and to focus on their unity in all their planning.

Supplementary Questions

One of the things that can really undermine marriage is independence.

1. Are you willing to be accountable to each other for the way you spend your money and time?
2. Are you open to each other's influence when making every decision?

Lesson 5: Restoring Unity

Conflict Resolution

Summary of Content

- All couples will experience conflict in their relationship.
- Arguments erode our trust and need to be resolved to preserve our unity.
- The Seven Deadly habits include: Harsh Start Up, Criticism, Contempt, Globalisation, Defensiveness, Stonewalling, Rejecting Repair Attempts.
- Connection Ritual: Connect Hug – helps to restore unity when there is tension or distance between us.
- Forgiveness is not an emotion; it's a choice, a vital step to the restoration of our unity.
- When we have hurts within our relationship, forgiveness alone is not enough – we also need Reconciliation.
- Concept: Reconciliation is the process of restoring trust and unity. It includes:
 - A sincere expression of sorrow
 - Empathy for the pain caused
 - A promise to avoid a repeat
 - The request for (and granting of) forgiveness.
- Saying 'sorry' is not enough to reconcile; we need to ask for forgiveness.
- Tool: Stop-LIFE-Reflect-Connect (Reconciliation)

Assessment & Comment

5a: Why is the ability to reconcile important for marriage?

Ideal Answer: Conflict and hurts are an inevitable part of an intimate relationship. Without the ability to reconcile, these hurts accumulate and can destroy a marriage.

Look for evidence of fiancés willingness to admit fault and accept responsibility in causing hurt to the other. Among the Seven Deadly Habits, CONTEMPT is particularly toxic.

5b: What is the difference between saying 'sorry' and asking for forgiveness?

Ideal Answer: Saying sorry is a 'self-focussed' statement expressing the emotion of the speaker. Asking for forgiveness is much harder to do and also more powerful because it requires vulnerability and humility. It is an essential part of reconciling as a couple.

Look for evidence that the couple has taken on board the gravity of being able to repair their relationship and that each fiancé is willing to develop the virtue of humility.

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5c: The Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the great gifts from God for healing our soul. Would you be open to going to Reconciliation before the wedding (or to receive a blessing if not Catholic)? (Select one from the options below)

- **Yes, with my celebrant**
- **Yes, but with a different priest**
- **Maybe, it depends**
- **Probably not, I'm not comfortable with this**

Many couples, even though they are sexually active, contracepting and appear to be distant to the teachings of the Church, have a sense that they want to come before God on their wedding day with a pure heart. If they have indicated a receptivity to the Sacrament, please make it easy for them! Affirm them, create the opportunity with minimum fuss.

Supplementary Questions

1. Were you able to identify any of the Seven Deadly Habits in your own relationship?
 2. Are you willing to work on removing these habits from your life?
 3. One of the things that Catholics do before receiving a Sacrament for the first time is spiritual preparation. What kind of spiritual preparation are you doing before you marry?
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Lesson 6: Sex- Sacred Embrace

The Theology of Sex

Summary of Content

- Sex is not something we do, it's something we say. It's a communication rather than an activity.
- Sex is so much more than just a recreational activity; it's a sacred body language.
- Sex is a powerful unifier. It energises us for deeper, less selfish loving.
- In marital lovemaking, our bodies speak the words of our wedding vows: "I freely give my total self to you, to you alone, to give you life, and our children life." (The word made flesh)
- Sexual Integrity allows us to fully integrate our body, mind, spirit and affections so all these dimensions can consistently 'speak' with one unified intention. It brings them all into alignment and thus speaks the truth in our bodies.
- Marriage is meant to be lived in a vibrant romantic atmosphere our whole life long.
- Connection Ritual: Connect Kiss – helps to sustain the romantic atmosphere.

Assessment & Comment

6a: Married sex is a sacred communication, a kind of prayer. What is your reaction to this statement?

Look for evidence of a reverence for the sacredness of sex. The idea that sex is a language is very counter cultural but if couples take the time to watch the videos they will usually embrace the idea as they can see that it will infuse their lovemaking with deeper meaning.

6b: In light of the material presented, are you willing to abstain from sex until your wedding day? (Select one from the options below)

- ☐ Yes, we are already doing this
- ☐ Yes, I would like to do this
- ☐ Maybe, we need to discuss this further
- ☐ Possibly, there are some logistics to solve
- ☐ Probably not, I'm not convinced it would help
- ☐ Doesn't apply, we're already married

Many couples will have differing views on this. It is not uncommon for one fiancé to desire abstinence but fear hurting or upsetting the other. Tread very gently if you plan to talk about this! (As some married couples do the course for enrichment, or are civilly married preparing for convalidation, the last option is provided.)

Supplementary Questions

Thinking about love making as a body language that says with the body the words of the wedding vows...

1. How does this impact the way you think about your vows?
 2. How does it impact the way you think about love making?
 3. What do you think the term 'sexual integrity' means?
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Lesson 7: Love Gives Life

Fertility Awareness Methods (FAMs)

Summary of Content

- A couple's sexual relationship has two inseparable dimensions: the **bonding** dimension unites them in body, mind and heart, and the **life-giving** dimension gives physical and spiritual life to their offspring and to each other.
- Both dimensions are necessary for our lovemaking to authentically reflect the divine.
- FAMs bring a couple into a deeper appreciation of their masculine and feminine uniqueness.
- The Church holds sexual love and the generation of new life in such high regard it would never condone the degrading of it through the use of contraception or artificial reproduction.
- FAMs equip a couple to reliably plan their families without compromising the sacred meaning of their lovemaking.
- Conscious Parenthood: The Church calls couples to be 'open to life'. It does not require a specific number of children, but rather encourages an attitude that invites God into our family planning decisions.
- Tool: Fertility Awareness Methods

Assessment & Comment

7a: In your own words, explain how Fertility Awareness Methods (FAMs) work.

Ideal answer: FAMs allow a couple to monitor the changing fertility level in the woman so that they can time their lovemaking to achieve their fertility goals.

Look for a basic appreciation of the way FAMs work. The course provides an introductory explanation so couples should not be expected to explain FAMs in detail or know how to use them without further instruction. SmartLoving offers the SmartFertility course for instruction in using the Sympto-Thermal Method.

7b: Are you willing to use FAMs to manage your fertility? (Select one from the options below)

- ☐ Yes, we already use it
- ☐ Yes, we want to learn how
- ☐ Yes, but not till a bit later
- ☐ Maybe, I'm open to it
- ☐ I would use FAMs if we had infertility issues
- ☐ I would use FAMs but I don't think my fiancé/spouse would
- ☐ Doesn't apply (eg post-menopause, infertile)
- ☐ No, I don't think this would work for us

A surprising number of couples are open to FAMs and are disillusioned with chemical alternatives. If they are receptive, encourage them to pursue it and provide contact details for local FAM services.

Supplementary Questions

There are a lot of misconceptions about Fertility Awareness Methods. They are actually a really good option for couples and they avoid many of the physical side effects of contraceptives.

1. Do you believe you have a good understanding of how FAMs work?
2. Being open to children is a big part of Catholic marriage. Have you talked about having children, and how you plan to manage that part of your lives?

Lesson 8: A Living Sign

Sacrament of Matrimony

Summary of Content

- Secular marriage and the Sacrament of Matrimony are not the same.
- Key Concept: Matrimony is more than a private relationship; it's a Sacrament – a living sign of God's love.
- The love of a sacramental couple mirrors the love Christ has for the Church.
- Before marrying in the Catholic church, it's important to understand to what you are committing:
 - *Permanency* – a commitment for life.
 - *Freedom to marry* – a commitment consented to without coercion or pressure.
 - *Sexual Intimacy* – the intention to engage in sexual intimacy
 - *Fidelity* – a commitment to forgo sexual activity with everyone other than your spouse.
 - *Unconditional sharing* – a willingness to share everything you have, including your material resources.
 - *Openness to children* – the possibility of children is welcomed.
 - *Raising children Catholic* – a commitment to baptise any children Catholic and raise them in the Catholic faith.
- God provides spiritual strength (grace) through the Sacrament.
- Marriage Saboteurs – in every relationship there are tough topics – things that need to be discussed. If left unaddressed these can become saboteurs of the relationship.
- Tool: Respectful Request

Assessment & Comment

8a: Thinking about the dimensions of the Sacrament of Matrimony (the Fine Print), select one that you think you will find most challenging or about which you are unsure. (Select one from the options below).

- **Permanency**
- **Freedom to marry**
- **Sexual Intimacy**
- **Fidelity**
- **Unconditional Sharing**
- **Openness to Children**
- **Raising Children Catholic**

8b: What reservations or concerns do you have?

Look for a mature response that recognises that there will be challenges. Couples who present with everything all worked out are ill-equipped for later trouble. In all cases, it's important to let the couple know that when things get difficult, they can find help through the SmartLoving resources. If either express misgivings, it might be appropriate to arrange to speak with them individually.

Supplementary Questions

It's important to address any concerns you might have about each other, your behaviours, expectations or beliefs, now, before the wedding.

1. Were you able to use the Marriage Saboteurs activity to discuss a tough topic?
2. Do you feel confident that you can do this again in the future if necessary?
3. God is ready to help you face any challenge in your relationship, to give you all the grace (spiritual strength) you need. Are you willing to ask God for help?

Lesson 9: Soul Mates for Life

Spiritual Intimacy

Summary of Content

- Our spirituality is a rich source for intimate sharing.
- Praying individually is a valuable tool for our marriage. Praying as a couple has the added benefit of deepening our intimacy.
- Connection Ritual: Evening Prayer
- It's important to reflect deeply on the vows so that we are connected to their meaning when we make them on our wedding day.
- The online Wedding Liturgy can help couples plan their readings and prayers.
- For Catholics, church is a faith family, a special belonging relationship.
- For mixed faith couples, it's important to share how you feel about the Catholic faith including any wounds, or prejudices you may have, from church members.

Assessment & Comment

9a: Have you identified any potential tensions in sharing your spiritual life together as a couple? What steps are you taking to resolve it?

Look for evidence that the couple has attempted the activities which draws out their spiritual beliefs and desires. We want to see a deep respect for each other's spiritual life.

9b: Having reflected on your wedding vows, how do you feel about making them on your wedding day? Explain your answer.

Look for evidence that the couple is at peace with committing to a Catholic marriage. If either expresses misgivings, give them the opportunity to explore them.

Supplementary Questions

1. Thinking ahead, who among your family and friends can best offer you the support you will need throughout your marriage?
 2. What strategies are you putting in place to make sure that your marriage stays strong?
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Questions Answered Together

Wedding Liturgy

Summary of Content

- Couples have access to the SmartLoving Wedding Liturgy Planner which lists the order of the Wedding Rite, prayer choices and common scripture readings. Many will review these and select their preferences.
- Wherever possible, it is suggested that celebrants accommodate couples in their choice of scripture and prayers provided that they are taken from Rite.
- SmartLoving discourages couples from writing their own vows as the validity of the Sacrament can be compromised. Rather, we provide a couple activity where they articulate in detail the meaning of each line of the vows so that they have a deep and personal attachment to them on their wedding day.
- SmartLoving affirms that all liturgy plans must be approved by their celebrant but that couples should prepare for the liturgy meeting by being familiar with the various parts of the Nuptial Rite.

Assessment & Comment

Wedding liturgy... Tick all that apply

- ☐ **We have not yet started planning our liturgy but will do so soon**
- ☐ **We have begun planning our liturgy and will be ready shortly to discuss it**
- ☐ **We've done as much as we can and are ready to discuss the liturgy with our celebrant**
- ☐ **We're not sure how to get started on this**
- ☐ **We have chosen our readings**
- ☐ **We have selected from our prayer choices**
- ☐ **We have our music organised**
- ☐ **NA**

Every couple wants their wedding day to be a special celebration that reflects the unique character of their relationship. Thus, they can feel frustrated by the constraints of the Church, especially if one is not Catholic or doesn't understand the meaning behind the rituals. The Catholic fiancé might feel embarrassed about the Church demands or about his/her ignorance. Some parts of the liturgy are not negotiable and should be gently and firmly defended. Others do have some flexibility and we encourage celebrants to be responsive to the couple's desires. Before rejecting a request, try to understand the values behind their preference so that you can help them think about other ways that value might be reflected in their celebrations.

Supplementary Questions

1. What are your priorities for your wedding day? What's your style? (eg – unity as a couple despite religious differences, guests feeling really comfortable, sacred and formal occasion, very personal and spiritual, lively and joyful, family occasion etc)
2. The wedding ceremony itself is a sacred occasion and some of your goals for your wedding day overall are not really compatible with that – How can some of these be achieved in other aspects of your wedding day (eg at the reception, rehearsal dinner, pre and post events?)
3. If you have chosen readings, tell me why you chose those?

Marital Fitness Plan

Summary of Content

A Marital Fitness Plan helps couples create concrete goals for their relationship, establish healthy relationship habits, and a safety net for when things get tough.

Assessment & Comment

What connection rituals will you put in place to sustain the vibrancy of your marriage? (Tick as many as apply)

- ☐ Daily Appreciation (1)
- ☐ Daily Strongest Emotion (2)
- ☐ Connect Hug (5)
- ☐ Connect Kiss (6)
- ☐ Evening Prayer (9)
- ☐ Others
- ☐ None/Not Applicable to me/us

What TOOLS do you think you will use again, or regularly? (Tick as many as apply)

- ☐ L.I.F.E. (2)
- ☐ Time Out to Ask 'Why?' (3)
- ☐ Stop-Reflect-Connect (Decision Making – 4)
- ☐ Stop-LIFE-Reflect-Connect (Reconciliation – 5)
- ☐ Fertility Awareness Methods (7)
- ☐ Respectful Request (8)
- ☐ None/Not Applicable to me/us

Look for evidence that the couple has adopted a proactive approach to sustaining their relationship. If they have not selected any of the Connection Rituals or Tools, ask what they WILL do instead. If they have selected only one or two, use that to explore why and how they experienced these rituals and tools throughout the course.

Supplementary Questions

1. Thinking ahead, what specific strategies will you use to keep your relationship vibrant?
 2. Should you experience difficulty in your relationship, to whom would you most likely turn for assistance?
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Ongoing Formation

Summary of Content

- This section gives insight into the areas where the couple perceives a need for further formation.
- Be prepared with local resources to assist them if possible.
- SmartLoving will also follow up with suggestions from our own resources.

Assessment & Comment

About which of the following areas would you like more information? (Tick as many as apply)

- ☐ Improving communication
- ☐ Understanding Family of Origin influences
- ☐ Handling conflict and anger
- ☐ Treating addictions and/or mental illness
- ☐ Healing for past hurts and/or trauma
- ☐ Dealing with sexual problems
- ☐ Fertility Awareness education
- ☐ Information about treating infertility
- ☐ Parenting education
- ☐ Learning about becoming a Catholic
- ☐ Praying together
- ☐ None/Not Applicable to me/us

Look for evidence that the couple has adopted a growth mindset in regards to their relationship – an attitude of continuous learning and betterment.

Supplementary Questions

The ability to grow is fundamental to your health and wellbeing as individuals and as a couple. When there is growth, there is hope; even if the starting place is dire, growth, and the willingness to change for the sake your relationship, presents the possibility that things can and will improve. There is always room for improvement!

1. What areas did you identify as growth areas, or areas of need?
 2. How will you go about getting resources to help you always be growing in your relationship?
 3. Would you be interested in being part of opportunities for couple growth offered by the parish?
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For brochures and additional resources, contact us or visit

www.smartloving.org/parish

to order online or sign up to our free partner program.