

The Joy of Love:
Six-Session Parish Conversation

Let's talk Family! Let's be Family!

THE JOY OF LOVE

[illegible]

Published 2017 by
Veritas Publications
7-8 Lower Abbey Street
Dublin 1, Ireland

publications@veritas.ie
www.veritas.ie

ISBN 978 1 84730 814 6

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Designed by Heather Costello, Veritas Publications
Printed by Walsh Colour Print, Co. Kerry

Veritas books are printed on paper made from the wood pulp of managed forests. For every tree felled, at least one tree is planted, thereby renewing natural resources.

FOREWORD

In his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of Love*, Pope Francis expresses his hope that families and those involved in supporting families will study his document carefully and patiently. This *Amoris: Let's Talk Family! Let's Be Family!* programme is an initiative to promote and resource this study in preparation for the World Meeting of Families in Dublin in August 2018. It has a number of elements:

- *The Joy of Love: Six-Session Parish Conversation* is a parish-based programme that explores key messages in *The Joy of Love* in an accessible and practical way.
- *Practical Initiatives for Popular Moments* offers a menu of activities that tie in with popular family moments to communicate key messages from *The Joy of Love*.
- A range of online resources will appear during the course of the year, including animations on *The Joy of Love* for both adults and children, as well as studio discussions and interviews.
- *A Facilitator's Guide* is also available to train local volunteers in delivering the *Amoris* programme.

All of these resources are available online at www.amoris.ie or www.worldmeeting2018.ie. While focusing especially on *The Joy of Love*, the *Amoris* programme also draws on two other key documents in Pope Francis' ministry: *Praise Be (On the Care of our Common Home)* and *The Joy of the Gospel*.

This *Amoris* programme seeks to fulfil some of the aims of *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. The directory sees that: '*the parish community is the focal point of faith development in all its forms*' (130). The directory also sees the importance of a

multimedia approach to faith development with adults. 'Information technology and other new and varied methods of communication should also be utilised. For adults, with a premium on their time, distance learning can be helpful' (75).

The facilitator's guide offers a practical means of calling and forming laypeople in the parish to take co-responsibility for the development and implementation of local faith development initiatives. The directory is clear on this. '*Collaborative teamwork is to be chosen decisively and encouraged wholeheartedly*' (87). Here it quotes Pope Benedict XVI: '*It is precisely your task, dear parish priests, to nurture the spiritual and apostolic growth of those who are already committed to working hard in the parishes. They form the core of the community that will act as a leaven for the others.*'

The directory also acknowledges the need for a gradual and differentiated approach to adult faith development in parishes. '*For some adults, introductory material may be sufficient, while others may be interested in deeper theological discussion*' (74). In that spirit, the *Amoris* programme includes a menu of initiatives, from one-off parish activities at popular family events through to a programme of conversation on *The Joy of Love*. This menu seeks to engage as many people as possible in faith development at a level they are comfortable with, and then invites them into further reflection and conversation on the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The World Meeting of Families and its preparatory catechesis offer dioceses and parishes an opportunity to progress their faith development work in a way that has potential to connect with the popular imagination in a manner that sustains beyond the event itself.

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Official Family Prayer for World Meeting of Families 2018

God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.

Bless us with the joy of love.

Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:

*(We pause and remember family members
and others by name.)*

Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.

This we ask, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.





LET'S TALK FAMILY!

The Joy Of Love: Six-Session Parish Conversation



This six-session programme is a preparation for the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Dublin in 2018. It invites participants to reflect on *The Joy of Love*, the document Pope Francis prepared after the two synods on the family and a worldwide consultation which took place before the synods.

This programme also responds to the vision outlined in *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*, which urges parishes to develop initiatives to involve people of all ages in reflection upon their faith and its implications for daily life. In each session, there

will be an exploration of how the aspirations of this programme are in line with those of *Share the Good News*.

In each session, the participants will be invited to take part in a process which is designed to be interactive and participative. They will be helped to reflect on and articulate their experience of family life and their response to Pope Francis' reflections in *The Joy of Love*.

The programme takes, as its starting point, people's experience of love and their hopes and fears with regard to marriage and family.

- The programme's **first** and **second sessions** deal with the reality of family life in the world today. We explore how Pope Francis recognises the widespread desire for permanence in love and his challenge to us as Church to communicate more effectively the Good News of the Gospel of the Family, which is supportive of that desire. It looks at the challenges posed by consumer culture to stability in family life, and the foundational role of God's love in our teaching on the permanence of married love and its openness to new life.
- In **sessions three** and **four**, the programme goes on to explore how love is lived in the family and how children are nurtured.
- In **session five**, the programme explores Pope Francis' understanding of human fragility in the reality of family life, the importance of reaching out to all, regardless of their circumstances, and the priority of God's mercy in how we approach that fragility. This challenges all pastoral agents and all families to reach out to people on the margins, which Pope Francis refers to as the peripheries. This session also explores the role of discernment in the concrete application of mercy.
- In the **final session**, the programme explores a spirituality of hope in regard to love and marriage. This session gives people the opportunity to listen to the experiences of older couples and to hear their advice to younger couples. It also includes Pope Francis' own practical advice on how families can be places of joy in the midst of human fragility.





SESSION ONE

The Reality of Family Life Today

Coping with change is never easy and all societies find it especially difficult to integrate rapid change... Yet life today in our postmodern world seems to be defined by change. In such a society, security is easily lost, and loneliness can go hand in hand with a frenetic life style... We must learn to dialogue with an ever changing human reality, in order to incarnate in new ways the meaning of life as we understand it in Jesus Christ. (*Share the Good News*, 15)



1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (10 min)

Leaders introduce themselves to the whole group, and then in small groups participants introduce themselves.

Leaders introduce the programme: This six-session programme explores Pope Francis' document about family life called *The Joy of Love*. The purpose of this short programme is to provide us with the opportunity to discuss what Pope Francis has to say in light of our own experiences of being part of a family and to reflect on the reality of family life today. Each night follows a simple structure and format. We will explore a topic drawn from *The Joy of Love* each night. We start by looking at our own experience in relation to that topic. Then, in the light of that experience, we look at what Pope Francis has to say.

Our first topic is *The Reality of Family Life Today*. We begin by looking at a video clip exploring

different people's experience of family today and then talk about that in our small groups. Then we hear some of what Pope Francis says about the elements of modern culture that support family life and those that make it difficult. We will then talk about that in our groups.

We hope to give everyone a chance to share their own experience of family life and their response to what Pope Francis says. This is what he has asked us to do, especially in preparation for the World Meeting of Families.

Pope Francis emphasises the huge importance of treating each other with respect, especially when we have different views on things. Can we chat for a few minutes on how we can show this respect to each other in this group?

Draw out some guidelines which will help people to communicate in a way that enables everyone to have their voice heard and respected, for example:

- Everybody is made to feel welcome
- Everybody gets a chance to speak – we don't interrupt or take over
- Everybody is entitled to their views – we can disagree, but we don't attack or belittle each other
- Ensure all mobile phones are turned off/silenced

At the end of each night we will record anything we think should be fed back to the World Meeting of Families Office so that it will form part of their listening process in planning the event.

2. Video Clip 1: Vox Pop (5 min)

In this piece of video you will hear a number of people who have different experiences of family life speak about their experience of the reality of family life today.



3. Discussion (15 min)

- What did you hear?
- What surprised you?
- Had you been asked, what would you have said?



4. Video Clip 2: Input from *The Joy of Love* on the Challenges Facing People Today (20 mins)

One of the reasons why Pope Francis wrote the document *The Joy of love*, after worldwide consultation, is because he believes that there is great wisdom among all members of the Church, including the young, the old, those on the edge or marginalised, as well as those at the centre. That includes this group gathered here this evening. Pope Francis wrote this document for everyone who belongs to a family whatever their role, be it parent, sister, brother, spouse, grandparent etc. Again, that includes all of us here tonight.



“It is my hope that, in reading this text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity” (7)





The Joy
of Love

“The Family is a good that society cannot do without and it ought to be protected,” (44)

“The desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and this is an inspiration to the Church,” (1)

“The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity,” (54)

Families are important for the future of the world and the future of the Church. The existence of families is even crucial for people to grow into healthy, happy human beings. Pope Francis wants to bring good news to families that will sustain them in the concrete realities of their daily lives. He says that ‘no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed’. Whatever its shape, the family is the first place where people experience love, where they learn that they are loved and how to love in return. This experience of love enables people to build a positive self-image and to create their own healthy relationships.

The desire of all, including young people, for a relationship based on permanent, exclusive love is a sign of hope for families. Everyone wants to be loved and they need to know that the love they experience will last.

Pope Francis refers to many positive aspects of today’s culture: people want to make mature decisions based on what they believe to be right, rather than simply making choices based on conformity. As a result people feel more in control of their own destinies and more fulfilled in the reality of their lives.

A recognition of the equal dignity of men and women facilitates a greater sharing of roles and responsibilities in families. This also helps people to feel more in control of their own future and gives individuals the possibility of achieving their own goals as well as contributing to the overall good of the family.



On the other hand, many of the values of popular culture can also work against family life and challenge the concept of permanent commitment to another person. When individualism and self-fulfillment are valued to the exclusion of concern for the other and for the common good, family relationships can

be weakened and each member of the family sees himself/herself as an isolated unit. People can become more absorbed in their personal fulfilment than in exploring how they can bring their gifts and talents to the service of others in their family and in the wider world.

“Freedom of choice makes it possible to plan our lives and to make the most of ourselves. Yet if this freedom lacks noble goals or personal discipline, it degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others,” (33)

The Joy
of Love

Pope Francis recognises the stresses on family life caused by factors such as unemployment, the pace of modern living, lack of suitable housing and poverty. Such stresses can cause people to be less patient with one another and less able to accommodate the needs of others in the family, leading to disharmony, even disintegration in families. He states that families deserve good family policy from political, social and financial authorities.

“Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals,” (44)

An increasing reliance on social media can lead people to think that life and human relationships can be navigated in the same way as social media sites and online relationships. A social media mindset can lead people to expect that relationships can be connected, disconnected, blocked or reconnected at will and does not take account of the complex nature of individuals and of human relationships. Pope Francis obviously

recognises the positive aspects of social media. He uses it himself on a regular basis, but he reflects on how young people are bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth and maturity through social media. Young people, in particular, need to be educated to recognise the values of social media for what they are.

The Joy
of Love

“They believe, along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly “blocked” (39)

The home is where children first learn about their faith. Faith is transmitted in the home not simply through the things that parents say to their children about their faith, but through the way they live their lives in the home and how they reach out to others, especially those in need. Pope Francis also points to the very important role that grandparents play in handing on the faith to their grandchildren.

The Church’s vision for love and marriage is deeply relevant today. While people long for permanent, committed, loving relationships the

Church’s vision for marriage will continue to be relevant. Pope Francis encourages the Church to find new ways of proclaiming this message to people in today’s world. People today will not accept something that is proposed purely from the perspective of authority, ‘because we say so’! Pope Francis says that rather than criticising or trying to impose, we need to find ways of presenting, in an attractive and appealing way, the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and family.





“As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failures” (35)

5. Discussion (20 min)

- What did you hear in people's experience of family life that is similar to what Pope Francis is saying?
- If you could speak directly to Pope Francis, what would you want him to hear about family life?
- At the end of this session what thoughts are you bringing away with you about the reality of family life in the world today?



6. Record Participants' Responses

At this point each evening it is recommended that you invite the participants to fill in a summary sheet, which has two purposes. Firstly, it will provide a brief record of some of the main points that emerged from the night's discussions, which can be referred to at the introduction of next week's session. Secondly it is a means of

capturing strongly felt responses to the content of tonight's session. These will be fed back to those who are planning the World Meeting of Families so that they can be heard in an appropriate way at the event. Leaders are invited to meet for a few minutes at the end of the session to collate the responses recorded on the comment sheets.



7. Video Clip 3: Closing Reflection (5 min)



8. Tea/Coffee





COMMENT SHEET

Available for photocopying

1. What are some of the main points that emerged in the discussion tonight that we can bring forward in summary to next week's session?

2. Are there points emerging from tonight's discussions that you want to have raised at the World Meeting of Families?

IN SUMMARY



Pope Francis had everyone in mind when he wrote *The Joy of Love*. It is intended for everyone who belongs to a family, whether they are a son, daughter, wife, husband, grandparent. Everyone has their own experience of belonging to a family and *The Joy of Love* is intended to address everyone in their own particular experience of family life.

The family is essential for the future of the world and the Church. Everyone first learns what love means in their family, as they become aware that they are loved, and learn how to love in return. This is essential so that people can grow into healthy mature individuals.

Everyone yearns for a relationship based on the ideal of permanent, exclusive love. This is a sign of hope for families.

Today people like to feel in control of their own lives and to make decisions based on what they believe to be right rather than on rules or regulations imposed from outside. This can lead to people being more mature and having a greater sense of responsibility for their own lives and their own futures.

There is a greater recognition of equality between men and women. When this translates into family life, it results in a better sharing of roles and responsibilities in the family and enables people to feel more in control of their lives.



However, when a person's desire for personal fulfillment quenches out their desire to love and care for others it can make it more difficult to cultivate a relationship of mutual love and care for others.

In many families relationships are under stress because of unemployment, the pace of modern life, poverty, lack of suitable housing and other factors. Pope Francis urges political and financial authorities to take measures to support the well-being of families. It is in the interests of society to do so.

While Pope Francis knows the many benefits of social media, he recognises that over-reliance on its way of managing our lives can lead to an expectation that human relationships can be managed in the same way as social media, capable of being switched off and reconnected at a whim. This is to ignore the complex nature of human relationships.

The home is where children first learn about God. Parents hand on faith to their children not only by what they say but, more importantly, by what they do and how they treat others both inside and outside of the home. Grandparents also play a highly significant role in handing on faith to their grandchildren.

As long as people long for relationships of permanent committed love, the Church's vision for marriage will be relevant in the world.





SESSION TWO

The Christian Vision for the Family

A Catholic vision seeks to sustain and enhance people's capacity to discover the meaning of life in the context of God's love. Such an understanding of the meaning of being human confirms the person's dignity as an individual, while supporting them in their relationships with God and with others.

(Share the Good News, 28)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome back. Last week we looked at the reality of family life as we have experienced it in our own lives and in terms of what we see happening in the world around us. Then we listened to how Pope Francis sees family life today as he addresses it in *The Joy of Love*. Here are some of the main points that came out of our discussion at the end of the night. *(Facilitator to recap on the discussion from the previous night.)*

Tonight we look at the Christian vision for family. Again, we start by listening to the experience of a

variety of people in the world today and then you will be invited to articulate your own experience. People have been asked to reflect on how they see family portrayed in the media, in movies etc, and then on their own ideal for family. Having watched the video, you will be invited to articulate your own thoughts and then we will hear what Pope Francis proposes in *The Joy of Love*. Let's begin by recalling the guidelines for good communication which we agreed last week.



2. Video Clip 4: Vox Pop (5 min)

People talk about their dream for their family.



3. Discussion (20 min)

People address these two questions:

- What did you hear in the vox pop?
- What is your dream for your own family?



Video Clip 5: Input – God Makes all the Difference (20 mins)

Pope Francis himself has chosen a life of celibacy. He is not married and does not have children. But he belongs to his family – his parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, and other relatives. All of us belong to one family context or another. Pope Francis intended that his document *The Joy of Love* would include all. And yet he does single out the unique and indispensable role of loving parents and their children. He sees it as our obligation to the future of humanity that we create welcoming places where children are born and supported to grow as free, mature human beings who are equipped to reach their own unique potential.



“Anyone who wants to bring into this world a family which teaches children to be excited by every gesture aimed at overcoming evil – a family which shows that the Spirit is alive and at work – will encounter our gratitude and our appreciation” (77)

Pope Francis affirms the value of sacramental marriage that is permanent, faithful and welcoming of children. Sacramental marriage makes sense when we believe in the Good News that God is love, that God loves each of us unconditionally and that God’s dream for each

one of us is that we grow to become the kind of people who love others and are loved in return. Otherwise the ideal of marriage as a permanent, committed, loving relationship may appear as ‘a dry and lifeless doctrine’.

“The lasting union expressed by the marriage vows is more than a formality or a traditional formula; it is rooted in the natural inclinations of the human person” (123)

God loves us no matter what! God’s mercy embraces everyone regardless of who they are or what they have done. In today’s world many people are caught up with material concerns, such as how much money we earn, objects we own, the position we hold in society. These

are things whose benefit for our lives can be immediately felt and seen in concrete reality. It can be difficult to even consider as important our relationship with the God of love whom we encounter deep within our hearts and to find time to nurture that relationship.

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a communion of love. Because we are created in God's image we are made for relationship, to love and be loved. It is written in our DNA! To really become

aware of this in our hearts we need to develop a relationship with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through reflection and communication with God.

“The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection” (13)



In this context, the Sacrament of Marriage is not just a social convention, it symbolises a couple's public commitment to one another and through it a couple receives God's grace to sustain them in their marriage. When a couple commits to this life-long relationship of love, in an awareness of being supported not only by

the love of their families and friends, but also by God's grace, it cannot but be a source of strength as they set out on their journey. Their common life as husband and wife, and the network of relationships that they build with their children and the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament.



“Marriage is a precious sign, for when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, “mirrored” in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God's love for us” (121)

Families who commit to faithfulness, stability and love are beacons of God's love in the world. Pope Francis says that every family despite its weaknesses, can be a light for the world.

God is the supreme Creator of all life. God created human beings in his own image and likeness. Pope Francis' ideal for married love is that it would always be open to a fruitfulness that gives birth to children and draws the couple beyond themselves. Real love always opens up to others, never closes in on itself. The couple that gives birth to new life is a living image of God who is the source of all life.

The Church upholds marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman, open to the possibility of life. Pope Francis reminds us that for those living in other family situations, 'The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception' (AL 54).

Christians in all family situations are members of the Church. Pope Francis reminds us that they require pastoral accompaniment that reaches out to them where they find themselves, in such a way as to lead them along a pastoral path of discernment and conversion.

Pope Francis commends families who care for their elderly relatives, sometimes in spite of the strain that may be placed on the other family members. Such families witness to the sanctity of life in all its stages. He urges the Church to assist and support families who care for and support their elderly members. Pope Francis also commends families who take care of family members with special needs. They witness the value of every human life, by 'caring for the mystery of the fragility of human life'. 'Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired ... If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognise and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities.'

“A special word of appreciation is due to those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially. Care and concern for the final stages of life is all the more necessary today, when contemporary society attempts to remove every trace of death and dying” (48)

“No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society” (52)

The Joy
of Love





Jesus constantly showed care and compassion for families during his life on earth. His Gospel of the Family was not a series of abstract ideas but rather a concrete source of comfort and companionship for every family, especially those who experienced difficulties. For example:

- He ministered to a couple on their wedding day in the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana;
- He visited Peter's mother-in-law who was ill;
- He offered sympathy when he heard of deaths in the homes of Lazarus and Jairus;
- He responded to the wailing of the widow at Nain whose son had died;
- He heard the pleas of the father of a child with epilepsy.

‘The covenant of love lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth illuminates the principle which gives shape to every family, and enables it better to face the vicissitude of life and history. On this basis, every family despite its weaknesses can become a light for the world’ (66)



Jesus also affirmed the indissolubility of marriage. He said ‘What God has joined together let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6).

However, Jesus always preached a Gospel of Mercy and no one was outside his love. Pope

Francis urges that the Church today accompany and minister to all families as Jesus did, including those whose marriage is broken and those who are in unions that the Church does not recognise as valid.

In the midst of the frenetic pace of life today the virtue of tenderness is important in family life. The image of a child sleeping in her mother's arms after being nursed is found in one of the Psalms as a concrete image for the love between God and his people. This is an image brimming with love and tenderness. God looks upon us with this

tender love all the time! Right now God is looking upon this gathering and his look is a gaze of love. Sometimes in family life, a gaze of love can say it all. Imagine the difference a gaze of love in a family can make as opposed to a look of scorn or contempt or perhaps even worse, a situation where people never meet each other's eyes.



“Against this backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness” (28)

There is no perfect family, but there are many great families. Families are a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities with all their joys and hopes and problems. Pope Francis insists that all families, whatever their make

and shape, are surrounded by God's love. At the same time we should not lose the awareness that the great values of Christian marriage and the family correspond to a yearning that is part of human existence.

“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype for the perfect family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems” (57)



5. Discussion (20 min)

- How does this vision of marriage compare with the image of family portrayed in modern media?
- How is it different?
- How does Pope Francis' reflection on God compare with your image of God?
- What have you found reassuring or challenging in tonight's discussion?

6. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

7. Video Clip 6: Closing Reflection (5 min)



8. Tea/Coffee



IN SUMMARY



God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We call this union between Father, Son and Holy Spirit the Blessed Trinity. God is a triune God, a communion of love. We are created in the image of God and so we are made for relationship, to love and be loved. God loves each one of us unconditionally. God's gaze of love is upon us at all times.

Everyone belongs to a family, whether as sister, brother, spouse, grandparent, son, daughter or parent. In *The Joy of Love* Pope Francis includes all in their different roles, all of whom are sharers in the love of the family. However, he singles out parents and their children, who he sees as vitally important for the future of the world and the future of the Church.

He affirms the value of sacramental marriage. A man and a woman who commit to a permanent, exclusive, life long relationship of love, and are open to the gift of new life in their children, are an icon of God's unfailing love for each one of us.

In the sacrament of marriage a couple receives the grace to sustain them in their lifelong commitment.

The ideal of permanence and exclusivity is countercultural in a world that values material things and where people move quickly from one focus to another.

While there is a Christian ideal, there is no such thing as the perfect family, but an interesting mosaic of different realities. Whatever their make and shape all families are surrounded by God's love.



God's love and mercy embraces everyone, whoever they are and whatever they have done. Pope Francis urges us to reach out to all families with care, compassion and support.

There are many stories in the Gospels which tell of Jesus reaching out to families, especially those in need: the wedding feast at Cana; Peter's mother-in-law; the widow at Nain, the father of a child with epilepsy. No one was outside of Jesus' love and mercy.

Pope Francis urges families to foster the virtue of tenderness by treating one another with the gentleness with which Jesus related to those around him.

Families are a gift to the Church which is 'a family of families'.





SESSION THREE

God's Dream for Love

Love is much more than a law imposed upon us: 'Since God has first loved us' (cf. 1 John 4-10), love is no longer a mere 'command'; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.
(*Share the Good News*, 59)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome again. During the first session we looked at the reality of family life today. Last time we looked at the ideal for family life as expressed in culture and as we experience it ourselves.

Then we went on to explore what Pope Francis says about the ideal for family life today. We will begin by recalling some of the main points that emerged from last week's discussion.



2. Video Clip 7: Kaleidoscope (5 min)

There is a strong desire in popular culture for love, especially love that endures. This video clip explores the dream of love that is portrayed in modern culture, especially pop culture.



3. Discussion (20 min)

What struck you from the video? How do the sentiments portrayed compare with your own understanding of love?





4. Video Clip 8: Input – St Paul's Vision of Love (20 min)

Pope Francis draws on St Paul's exploration of love in 1 Corinthians 13: 4–7. Saint Paul was passing on to the early Christians Jesus' message about love. These are some of the things Pope Francis says:

- **Love is nurtured in the daily lives of families:** Love between people grows and changes as people grow and change. To be able to love another in a mature way, we need to develop a set of interpersonal skills to help us to consider what is and is not important in how we act as we relate to others. One thing that can help us to develop these skills is a reflection on St Paul's teaching.
- **Love is patient:** Patience takes root when we recognise that other people also have a right to live in this world just as they are. We must not expect everything to turn out as we would ideally like it to, or that everybody would be just as we would like them to be. When we cultivate this attitude, we become compassionate and more ready to accept another with their differences and failures. Being patient means being slow to anger.



“Unless we cultivate patience we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds” (92)





- **Love is kind:** Actions speak louder than words. Kindness is shown in how we act. To be kind means always being ready to be of assistance to others. As St Ignatius of Loyola says: 'Love is shown more by deeds than by words'.
- **Love is not jealous:** If we truly love someone we are delighted when they do well in something or when something really good happens for them. True love values the gifts and achievements of others. It recognises that everyone has their own road to happiness, possesses different gifts and is destined for a unique path in life. Love moves us to find ways of helping those who are cast aside by society.

“Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another’s prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned with the happiness of others but only with our own well-being. Whereas love makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves” (95)

The Joy
of Love

- **Love is not boastful:** Love challenges a mindset that sees one person as being in any way superior to another. It fosters humility and avoids boasting about our own achievements. People who love are less focused on themselves and more focused on others.

“The inner logic of Christian love is not about importance and power; rather, “whoever would be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:27) (98)



- **Love is not rude:** Love never makes others suffer. It is not rude, impolite or harsh. It requires that we learn how to listen, how to speak and how to keep quiet. It urges respect for the freedom of other people. Words are powerful tools. We must learn to use words, as Jesus did, to console and encourage rather than to demean, sadden or show scorn.

“To be open to a genuine encounter with others, a “kind look” is essential. This is incompatible with a negative attitude that readily points out other people’s shortcomings while overlooking one’s own,” (100)

- **Love is generous:** Love is more interested in loving than being loved. Pope Francis quotes St Thomas Aquinas who speaks of mothers as being an example of those who love the most, who seek to love more than to be loved. Love demands nothing in return.
- **Love is not irritable:** Sometimes we may be tempted to react with impatience, lack of understanding, even anger towards others, just because they are as they are. They can be led to think of themselves as being troublesome, even worthless. This is not the way of love.

“If we must fight evil, so be it; but we must always say “no” to violence in the home,” (104)





- **Love reacts with indignation only towards injustice:** It is one thing to feel an urge to act out of hostility towards another but it is another to give into it, as St Paul says, 'Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger'. Pope Francis urges that we do not let the day end without making peace in our family.
- **Love Forgives:** When we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is not easy. It calls for sacrifice, generosity and openness on the part of the person who has been offended. Today we know that we need to learn to accept and forgive ourselves first in order to have an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness towards others. If we keep searching for other's faults, it leads to resentment, which is the opposite of forgiveness.

“If we accept that God's love is unconditional, that the Father's love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us” (108)

The Joy
of Love

- **Love Rejoices with others:** In a family when something good happens to one person they should know that others will be there to celebrate it with them. In order to be able to rejoice with others we must learn to focus on their dignity and value their abilities and good works, rather than on their weaknesses. It is always important to remember that none of us is perfect, we all have our good points and our bad points. If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence.

“If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, and focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence, for, as Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)” (110)



- **Love bears all things:** love calls us to speak well of others. This does not mean being blind to the faults of others but that we see their faults and weaknesses in a wider context, recognising that we are all a complex mixture of light and shadows. When we believe that love does not have to be perfect to be real we can then appreciate that the other person loves us as best they can.

“If I expect too much the other person will let me know, for he or she can neither play God nor serve all my needs. Love co-exists with imperfection” (113)

- **Love believes all things:** In this context ‘belief’ means trust. Love trusts, which means it sets free and does not try to dominate, possess or control. This freedom fosters independence and openness to the world around us. It enables people to share openly with one another, rather than being secretive in the fear of judgement or suspicion. It avoids deceit, falsehood and lies. It allows each member of a family, each partner in a marriage to develop their own separate interests and involvements as well as their relationships with each other.

“Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything” (115)

- **Love hopes all things:** Love hopes for a better future. Everything, including people, can change. Even if transformation does not take place in this world, the Christian lives in the hope of eternal life and hopes that God’s dream for humanity will be realised in the next life.



- **Love endures all things:** Love is prepared to endure difficulties and stand firm and if necessary to confront challenges. It never gives up even in the darkest hour. There are extraordinary examples of this in situations where, in spite of their difficulties, couples continue to show care for one another. Families endure the most horrendous situations of pain, illness, financial difficulties in a spirit of mutual support and love.

“The Christian ideal, especially in families,
is a love that never gives up,” (119)

The Joy
of Love

5. Discussion (20 min)

Which of these characteristics of love do you think you need to cultivate in your own life? In your family?

Which do you think might be most difficult? Why?

Where have you seen love in action?



6. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

7. Video Clip 9: Closing Reflection (5 min)

8. Tea/Coffee



VIDEO
CLIP 9

IN SUMMARY



Pope Francis wants to help us to understand the Christian message about love. He draws on St Paul's teaching on love in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Love grows and changes in families as people grow and change. Love does not have to be perfect to be real. But we can learn to relate in ways that help love to grow.

Love is patient: We must not expect that everything will turn out just as we want it to. To be patient is to be slow to anger.

Love is kind: Love is more than a feeling. It's about how we act, especially how we treat others. When someone does something for another out of love they do not expect to be repaid.

Love is not jealous: Love values the achievements of others. 'It frees us from the sour taste of envy'. (95)

Love is not boastful: Love prevents us from seeing ourselves as superior to another.

Love is not rude: Love compels us to use words as Jesus did, to console and encourage rather than to demean, sadden or show scorn.

Love is generous: Love demands nothing in return.

Love is not irritable: Love does not react harshly to the faults and failings of others. To do so causes hurt and alienation. Pope Francis urges that we never let the day end without making peace in our families.

Love forgives: When we have been hurt, forgiveness is not easy. It calls on us to try to understand other people's weaknesses, knowing that we also have our own weaknesses.

Love bears all things: Pope Francis urges that people learn to speak well of one another, rather than point out another's faults and weaknesses.

Love believes all things: If we love someone we need to trust them. When someone knows they are trusted and appreciated, they are able to be open and hide nothing. This leads to mutual growth and open sharing in a relationship.

Love endures all things: The Christian ideal is a love that never gives up.





SESSION FOUR

Married Love Growing to Maturity

The primary place of encounter with God for most adults, and children, is family life. For Christians, the family is the first experience of Church: 'The home should be the first church which children know, and in which they are reminded about God and helped to pray by what they see around them.' It is within family, 'the domestic Church', that we first live our Christianity, that we identify what Christian life consists in, that we learn beliefs and values, and grow in prayer. (*Share the Good News*, 83)



1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome to this our fourth session. So far we have looked at the reality of family life, our ideal for family life, and the practice of love in families. Tonight there are two parts to our presentation. In the first part we explore what Pope Francis says about sexual love between a loving couple. We

then go on to explore the relationships between parents and their children and we look at what Pope Francis says to parents, grandparents and other significant adults in the lives of children. Can we remind ourselves once again of our ground rules for good discussion?



2. Video Clip 10: Children's Art – Gallery Walk (10 min)

A selection of drawings by First Communion-class children showing how they have experienced family love are placed on the walls. Participants are invited to do a gallery walk. Alternatively, if for any reason that is not possible, show the short video clip of drawings, by children from around

Ireland about how they have experienced love in their families, or download the images and display them. A pack containing reproductions of the images is available from the World Meeting of Families office.



3. Discussion (15 min)

What struck you from the drawings? What was as you expected? Did anything surprise you? How

do they relate to your own childhood? How do they relate to you now?



4. Video Clip 11: Input from *The Joy of Love* (20 min)

Conjugal love between a husband and wife is, according to Pope Francis, the greatest form of friendship. It has all the characteristics of a good

friendship: concern for the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, fidelity and stability. In marriage a couple commits to sharing and

shaping the whole of life in an indissoluble, exclusive union. Pope Francis says that the erotic dimension of love is not 'a permissible evil or a

burden to be tolerated for the good of the family'. Rather it must be seen as a gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses.

“Sexuality is inseparably at the service of this conjugal friendship for it is meant to aid the fulfillment of the other” (156)



Pope Francis urges couples to seek to appreciate the sacredness of each other as persons, without feeling the need to possess. He warns of the consumerist mentality which seeks to purchase,

possess or consume, a mentality which has no time to appreciate and value beauty, but focuses instead on pleasure.

“Tenderness ... is a sign of a love free of selfish possessiveness. It makes us approach a person with immense respect and a certain dread of causing them harm or taking away their freedom” (127)



Openness to new life is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian family. A couple who give birth to a child is a living image of God who created and sustains all life. The love of a couple who are open to new life is never solely focused on themselves but is open to another. This is a mark of real love which is always open to others.

“From the outset, love refuses every impulse to close in on itself; it is open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself” (80)

However marriage was not instituted solely for procreation but also that mutual love might be expressed in the context of a committed relationship and, through that, that it would grow and mature.

“Marriage ... is a friendship marked by passion, but a passion always directed to an ever more stable and intense union” (125)

It is marked by mutual respect, freedom and tenderness, and is exclusive, faithful and open to new life.



Parents bring their children for Baptism where they receive the gift of faith. Faith is God's gift. Through parents, God enables the gift of faith to grow and develop. With support, encouragement and care, the seed that is sown in the sacrament can blossom. We do not own the gift of faith, it is entrusted to us to nurture and care for.



“Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today's world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to survive. Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and serve our neighbour” (287)

Parents are the first and most important educators of their children. The most important thing that parents teach their children is about love. Children learn what love is when they recognise that they are loved by their parents. Children see love in action when they experience their parents expressing their love for them and for one another. Their parents' love for them and for one another is their best example of

what God's love is like. The mutual love between the parents is as important for children as the individual love of each parent for them. Where, for whatever reason, a child lives with one parent, the experience of that parent's love is the child's best example of what God's love is like. Pope Francis also reminds us of the vital importance of the wider family circle in surrounding children with the experience of love.

“Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father; both are necessary for a child's integral and harmonious development. We are speaking not simply of the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one's life and the solid foundation of the family” (172)

A child learns to trust when they come to know that they can rely on their parents and that their parents will always love them, whatever their faults or failings. If a child has reason to

doubt this, it causes hurt and many emotional difficulties that make their path to maturity very difficult. They will also find it difficult to trust others in the future, including God.

Adults pass on their faith to their children in all sorts of intentional and unintentional ways. If children experience respect, care for the other, generosity, and compassion in action they learn how to be respectful, generous and compassionate towards others. On the other hand, if they experience anger, resentment, rejection, jealousy or violence in action they learn how to be mean-spirited, rude and impatient towards others.

It is important to train children to acknowledge their wrongdoing and to ask for forgiveness. Children who are lovingly corrected feel cared

for. Young children tend to be self-focused because they haven't yet experienced the larger world. They need help to realise that there are other people in their world who also have needs which have to be met.

Educating children to make good choices in a way that will facilitate them in knowing what to do and what to avoid when they no longer have the hands-on guidance of their parents is not easy. It's not simply about knowing at an intellectual level what is 'right' and 'wrong' but having a 'deep down' sense of what is good and a desire to make that happen.

“The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom. Certain inclinations develop in childhood and become so deeply rooted that they remain throughout life, either as attractions to a particular value or a natural repugnance to certain ways of acting” (274)

The Joy
of Love





“We have to reach the point where the good that the intellect grasps can take root in us as a profound affective inclination, as a thirst for the good that outweighs other attractions and helps us to realise that what we consider objectively good is also “good for us” here and now” (265)

In an age when sex is trivialised, good age-appropriate sex education is very important. It should be seen in the context of education for love and mutual self-giving. Young people need help to realise that they are being bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth towards maturity. They should be helped to seek out and recognise positive influences and to shun those that cripple their capacity for real love. The primary role in any of this is the role of parents.

The Joy
of Love

“Sex education should include respect and appreciation for differences, as a way of helping the young to overcome their self-absorption and to be open and accepting of others ... only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centredness and self-absorption” (295)

5. Discussion (20 min)

What struck me from this input? How does it relate to my own life?

6. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

VIDEO
CLIP 12

7. Video Clip 12: Closing Reflection (5 min)

8. Tea/Coffee



IN SUMMARY



Married love is expressed through deep friendship and also through erotic love, which enables love between a couple to grow and mature. It is marked by exclusivity, lifelong commitment and openness to the gift of new life in children.

Pope Francis says that in marriage erotic love is good in itself, and when expressed with mutual respect and in an awareness of the sacredness of each person it enables love to deepen and strengthens a couple in their friendship and commitment.

Openness to new life is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian family. Love is never self-focused but is always open to others. A couple who give birth to a child is a living icon of God the Creator of all life.

Marriage was not created solely for procreation but so that conjugal love could be expressed in the context of a committed relationship and that through its expression love and mutual respect and understanding would grow and flourish.

Children receive the gift of faith in Baptism and parents are the first and most important people who help their children's faith to grow and develop. Others such as those who teach in Catholic schools, priests and others who minister in the parish assist parents in this role.

Children first learn from their parents what it means to love and be loved and so are able to grow to maturity, able to reach out in love and confidence to others and to God.



Parents hand on faith not only by what they say but by what they do, the kind of people they are and the values by which they live.

It is particularly important, when sex is trivialised, that children receive a sex education appropriate to their age and stage of development, so that they can recognise the negative and positive messages that bombard young people today.





SESSION FIVE

God's Mercy – No One Excluded

A genuine welcome that transcends any feeling of awkwardness or alienation is essential. Everyone has something to offer. Often, those who think they have least to give are, in fact, carrying with them instincts and insights that can open wide new ways of understanding and living for others. Faith should not be another of the areas in which we allow people to find themselves impoverished.

Where there is a breakdown in family life, helping the family to maintain a sense of family community, even where people are no longer living together, can make a useful contribution. The Christian community defines itself by how well it supports families in need. (*Share the Good News*, 121)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome to our fifth session. So far we have looked at the reality of family life, we have considered the Christian ideal and we have explored the importance of how love is lived out in the family.

Tonight we look at the gap for all of us between the ideal and the reality in our family

experiences. None of us is perfect, however all of us are included in God's love and mercy. We look at the challenges that Pope Francis poses to us to truly reflect that inclusive love and mercy. We also explore what Pope Francis says about the importance of accompanying newly weds and those preparing for marriage.



2. Video Clip 13: Vox Pop (10 min)

A selection of short interviews with people about their different experiences of family life. Interviewees to include: a couple whose marriage struggled but survived; a couple whose marriage

didn't survive; parents who have chosen not to marry; a couple in a second union; someone who is gay or lesbian; a single parent, etc.



3. Discussion (15 min)

What do these stories say to you?





VIDEO CLIP 14: INPUT THE PRACTICE OF GOD'S MERCY (20 MIN)

Pope Francis insists in *The Joy of Love* that God's mercy and compassion is for all, regardless of their marital status, gender, colour, age or social status. Jesus showed concern and mercy to all, especially those on the margins, even if they did

not show in their way of life that they believed in his teaching or accepted his values. We are urged to relate today with the same care and compassion to all families whether or not they meet with the ideals of Jesus' teaching.



“Although she constantly holds up the call to perfection, and asks for a fuller response to God, the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm” (291)

Pope Francis encourages us to acknowledge the good that is present even in imperfect situations. Family units that may appear as if they do not conform to the ideal may at the same time be places of love, care for others, and service to the communities where they live and work. The Church upholds the ideal of marriage as a committed, permanent union between a man and a woman open to new life. However, the Church must also support families who do not match this ideal. ‘The Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital.’ (291)

Judgements, if they are made from outside of a particular family situation, may fall into the trap of failing to take account of all its complexities about which an outsider simply cannot be fully aware. People may also be highly distressed because of their situation, and to react in such a manner as to cause further distress is not the Christian way.

The choice of civil marriage or cohabitation is often not motivated by prejudice or resistance to sacramental union but simply by cultural or other practical issues. The choice to ‘live together’ is often made because of a resistance to anything institutional or it may be due to practical situations such as the cost of celebrating marriage or lack of housing or permanent well-paid employment. In such circumstances we are challenged to welcome such couples just as Jesus welcomed the Samaritan woman at the well. He addressed her desire for true love, in order to free her from the darkness in her life and to bring her to the full joy of the Gospel.



“There are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church's history: casting off and reinstating. The Church's way ... has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement ... The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever; it is to pour out the balm of God's mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart ... for true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous” (296)



We can help everyone to find his or her proper way to participate in the life of the Church and to experience the unconditional mercy of God, as Jesus showed it to those around him. The power of the Holy Spirit to influence people in all circumstances is immense, if we can find and keep open appropriate channels of communication. In situations where people, by their words or actions, propose something other than what the Church teaches, Pope Francis suggests offering them the possibility of coming in touch with Gospel values through

participation in prayer gatherings, charitable or social initiatives. But always, he insists, keep the door open! Pope Francis talks about the complexity of judging the 'sinfulness' of a situation. When it comes to the question of moral responsibility, we always need to take into account a person's affective immaturity, or other psychological or social factors that lessen, if not even reduce to a minimum, moral culpability. He quotes *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* which mentions the following as circumstances which may mitigate moral responsibility:

“responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments and other psychological or social factors (CCC 1735)” (302)



In situations of apparent failure an individual or a couple may be making what is for now the most generous response they can to God's call. Whatever stage a person is at is always only a particular stage along the journey, with many

possibilities for change and new stages of growth. Each of us can make a decision to do or not do something, but only God can judge its sincerity and significance.

“A small step in the midst of great human limitations can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties,” (305)



Our conscience has a defining role to play in our decisions as to what is right or wrong for us to do. There is a need to help people discern what they should do by listening to that voice deep within, rather being distracted by the myriad voices screaming from outside. We can help people to consider how they feed their internal voice so that it speaks the words of the Gospel of Christ rather than those of the Gospel of the World. Conscience is not about doing what we feel like. It involves bringing objective and sometimes difficult questions into our encounter with God. For example, ‘The divorced and remarried should ask themselves: how did they act towards their children when the conjugal union

entered into crisis; whether or not they made attempts at reconciliation; what has become of the abandoned party; what consequences the new relationship has on the rest of the family and the community of the faithful; and what example is being set for young people who are preparing for marriage’ (300). It is a conversation on these questions before God and with God, a conversation which always includes giving full consideration to the teaching of the Church, to the impact of my decisions on others, and so on. We are called to accompany people with the tenderness of Christ as they take personal responsibility for their decisions and actions and live with the consequences.

5. Discussion (20 min)

How do you feel about what Pope Francis says here?

What do you find most challenging? Most reassuring?



6. Video Clip 15: Take a moment for quiet reflection

PART II: SUPPORTING NEWLY WEDS AND THOSE PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE (20 MIN)

Pope Francis stresses the importance of whole communities being involved in helping engaged couples prepare for marriage. Christian communities themselves benefit from this important work of supporting young couples as they grow in love. The best preparation for marriage is that which happens from childhood in the context of life in a loving family.

Young couples are not expected to be experts on every detail of the Catechism. What is important is a sharing of Christian values and good advice from people who have lived married life with courage and generosity. Discussion groups and a variety of optional talks on topics of genuine interest to young people can also prove helpful.

“Learning to love someone does not happen automatically nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage. For every couple marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment. Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision” (208)



Couples should be strongly advised to discuss what each expects from marriage, what they understand by love and commitment, what each wants from the other and what kind of life

they want together. Such discussions can enable couples to discern what, if anything, they have in common and to avoid making a marriage commitment based on desire alone.

“The decision to marry should never be encouraged unless the couple has discovered deeper reasons that will ensure a genuine and stable commitment” (211)

Marriage preparation should focus not just on the marriage ceremony as the end of a process but on marriage as a lifelong commitment based on mutual love. It is important that resources are available to couples as they need them: places,

people and services that they can turn to when the need arises. It is also important to remind them of the availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



Pope Francis acknowledges some of the challenges facing newly married couples:

- Learning how to accept each other's differences
- Separating from their parents
- Responding to the birth of their first child
- Dealing with financial and other practicalities

Then there are the occasional crises that affect families at different times and in different ways:

- The stresses of raising children at the various stages of their development from early

childhood to adolescence to dealing with the experience of their children eventually moving out to begin their adult lives

- Emotional, social or spiritual difficulties
- Learning how to resolve differences and to forgive
- Problems in the workplace

Difficulties will arise in all families from time to time because of human weakness. It is important that couples learn to be realistic regarding their expectations of one another and to recognise and respect each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The Joy
of Love

“Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope. Hope is the leaven that, in those first years of engagement and marriage, makes it possible to look beyond arguments, conflicts and problems and to see things in a broader perspective. Hope also bids us live fully in the present, giving our all to the life of the family, for the best way to prepare a solid future is to live well in the present” (219)

Those best placed to accompany families in times of difficulty are their own or other families. Experienced and trained couples can be of immense support to others and it is important that such training is easily available to interested

couples. Through their ministry, God's mercy and care is mediated to families in need of support. Pope Francis also highlights the importance of parishes supporting newly wed couples.



7. Discussion (15 min)

- What helped you most as you prepared for marriage?
- If you had to deal with difficult times, what did you find helpful?
- Do you think you or your parish could help other married couples or those preparing for marriage?



8. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

9. Video Clip 16: Closing Reflection (5 min)



10. Tea/Coffee



IN SUMMARY



PART I

Pope Francis draws our attention to God's unending mercy which extends to all, regardless of who they are or what they have done. Jesus showed God's mercy in action when he reached out to all who were in need, especially those who were most marginalised. Today we are called to do likewise. The Church, while upholding the ideal of Christian marriage, is called to reach out to all families with support and understanding.

It is unwise to make judgements from outside of particular situations, without full awareness of all the factors involved in the choices people have made or the realities that exist behind outward appearances.

In the midst of the business and distractions of life, people need help to discern what God is asking of them, to be able to hear the inside voice of conscience in the midst of the myriad other voices that clamour for attention. It is important to be aware that people may be responding to God's call in the best way that is possible for them at a particular time. We must always respond as Jesus did, with mercy and understanding.

There are many ways in which people can be involved in the daily life of the local Church, such as through prayer gatherings or charitable social initiatives. We must always keep the door open!

PART II

Christian communities are called to accompany young couples as they prepare for marriage. Programmes offered in a spirit of Christian love and care that help young people to openly discuss their hopes and fears for married life as well as offering good advice are most helpful.

Through open discussion young people need to discover if their mutual attraction is based on genuinely shared interests and concerns. This is a sound basis for marriage.

It is important also to minister to newly married couples as they adjust to married life. Those best placed to offer this assistance are their own and other families.

We need to help young couples to recognise the challenges they face, and to look forward with hope to the future. Parishes have an important role to play here.

There are many skills that can be of great value to young married couples and they can be helped to acquire these by other couples who are trained to do this work.





SESSION SIX

A Gospel of Hope for our Families

Parents, guardians and grandparents learn that family moments are, in themselves, sacred. Family rituals build up a sense of family as community. Small ways in which parents teach their children, loving them, caring for them, providing for them, are already contributing to the children's growth. Giving children a sense of what it means to experience trust, generosity, tenderness and hope is, in itself, a gift. Indeed, it is pre-evangelisation. Helping them to know that they, too, can be gentle, forgiving, pure in heart, compassionate and bringers of peace, is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in a profound way. To pray with our children about life in all its realities is sacred. For parents to play with their children day by day is sacred too. (*Share the Good News*, 120)



1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (5 min)

Welcome to our final session. Tonight we seek to finish on a note of hope. We hear how a variety of people have sought to bring love to their families: old people, young people, married people, single people and so on. We explore a spirituality for families and we listen to the advice Pope Francis offers on the practicalities of day-to-day living and loving in families.



2. Video Clip 17: Vox Pop (5 min)

A selection of short interviews with older people on what helped their love and commitment to endure throughout their lives, advice they offer the young generation.



3. Discussion (15 min)

- What did these stories say to you?
- What seemed to be important in their lives?
- Where did you see signs of hope for your own family?

4. VIDEO CLIP 18 INPUT: PART I: A SPIRITUALITY OF FAMILY LIFE



The spirituality of the family is a spirituality of communion. Family life is marked by thousands of small gestures of give and take, of sharing and doing without, and of putting the needs of others before one's own needs. In the midst of that reality of love, given and shared, God's love is always present.

The human person has 'an inherent social dimension'. Our growth to our full potential as human beings is best achieved in relationship with others. The family is the first place where we have the opportunity to experience and grow in communion with others.

“A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him of our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings and to ask Our Lady to protect us beneath her maternal mantle” (318)



All of the moments of family life whether they be moments of suffering and pain, or of joy and celebration are opportunities for connection with one another and with God. A family where

love is shared and expressed is an image of the love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and God's love is always present.

“To want to form a family is to resolve to be part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world here no one will feel alone” (322)

A family, where life is nurtured and cared for, shares in God's creative work. Families are open to life not only through generating new life but through offering hospitality and care to others, especially those in need. A family lives its spirituality by enabling love to grow within

the family unit and also by reaching out in love to others. Pope Francis also highlights the vital role of the family in developing the attitudes and values which urge us to care for our common home, the earth.

The family is the place where children's faith is first awakened. While parents want the best for their children and bring them for Baptism and accompany their early steps in faith development, they know it's not a question of imposing their faith on their children. Children need to have their own experiences of faith. They need symbols, actions and stories. Parents and others cannot impose their faith on children. Children's faith is nurtured through experiences of prayer and by having access to symbols such as good religious art, so that they begin to see for themselves that their faith is something attractive and beautiful. Moments of family prayer are particularly important, including opportunities to read and reflect on sacred Scripture.

There are moments in every day which offer themselves as moments for prayer or for fostering awareness of God's presence. Here are some suggestions, there are many others:

- Pray the Grace Before and After Meals, particularly at special meal times.
- Accompany children as they prepare to celebrate First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.



- Encourage children to help make a prayer space (they will have done this in school). They can add different objects that link with particular times or seasons and then it can become a focus for prayer.
- Encourage children to be aware of the beauty of nature during each season, and to see nature as the work of God.
- Show children how they can help to care for the environment, God's gift not only to us, but to everyone who lives on the planet now, as well as to those who come after us.
- Remind children to pray for family members who have died who continue to be connected with us and are members of God's family.
- Share with children how the day has been for both parents and children; how they have tried to love their neighbour; perhaps read a line from Scripture.

Discussion (15 min)

- What do you find helps you to create a sense of God being with you in all that happens in your family life?
- How important do you think it is for children to have opportunities to be in touch with a sense of the spiritual?
- What hints would you give to other families?



5. Distribute photocopies (page 58) of the advice Pope Francis gives to families. Invite the participants to take time to read them (5 min)

- Always remember to say Please, Thanks, Sorry ... In good times learn how to be open and communicate, so that you will be able to continue to do so in times of difficulty.
- Celebrate happy moments, and individual successes and support each other in the difficult passages of life. Value everyone's achievements, however insignificant they may appear.
- Respect each other's freedom. Everyone needs space, some more than others. An awareness of individual needs gives people a sense of being trusted and valued.
- Give a kind look. Never underestimate the value of a gaze of love.
- Learn to forgive. Before we can forgive others we must learn to forgive ourselves. Be slow to point out the limitations of a loved one.
- Listen to the older members of the family tell their stories and, in particular, encourage children and adolescents to do so.
- Be slow to judge another whose situation you do not fully understand.
- Always find time for family prayer, even a few moments every day.

6. Discussion (20 min)

- How do you feel about what Pope Francis says here?
- What do you find challenging?
- What, if anything, will you take with you from tonight?

7. Invite the participants to fill in the comment sheets

8. Video Clip 19: Closing Reflection (5 min)



9. Tea/Coffee



IN SUMMARY



The spirituality of the family is a spirituality of communion. We grow to our full potential as human beings through our relationship with others. The family is where we learn how to share life with others, through the give and take of every day, through sharing and doing without and through recognising and responding to the needs of others as well as our own needs. God's love is present in all of this.

All moments of family life are times of connection with one another and with God. Every family in which love is shared is an image of the love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Families where life is nurtured through welcoming new life and through caring for others are sharing in the creative work of God. Pope Francis urges families to nurture respect and care for 'our common home,' the earth.

Children's faith is first nurtured in the home. Every day there are opportunities for fostering children's faith, for example through:

- Family prayer
- Having religious imagery and symbols visible in the home
- Praying before and after meals
- Being involved in children's sacramental preparation

- Creating a prayer space in the home
- Helping children to appreciate the beauty of nature as a sign of God's care
- Encouraging care for the environment
- Praying for family members who are dead
- Reading and reflecting on short scripture passages



ADVICE POPE FRANCIS GIVES TO FAMILIES

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