

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)

The Joy of Love

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)



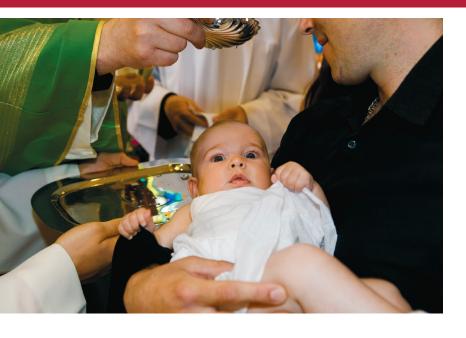
Openness to new life is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian family. A couple who give birth to a child is a living image of God who created and sustains all life. The love of a couple who are open to new life is never solely focused on themselves but is open to another. This is a mark of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



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



- 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.

