

SESSION 2

MARRIAGE AS VOCATION

OPENING PRAYER [5 minutes]

(Facilitator invites participants to observe a moment of silence in preparation for the opening prayer. After a brief silence, the Facilitator invites all participants to say the opening prayer together from Session 2 of the Participant's Booklet.)

Good and gracious Father,
from the beginning
you created man and woman
and called them to join their lives
as husband and wife.
Open our minds
to recognize your presence in our relationship
that calls us to unity.
Open our hearts
to imitate your self-giving love
that leads to holiness.
Open their ears
to hear your call
to deepen our commitment to one another.
Open our hands
to reach out in care
to our family and to the world.
We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS SESSION [10 minutes]

(Facilitator briefly reviews the main ideas from the opening session as follows:)

- This series will combine key spiritual concepts with the findings from scientific research.

- The first spiritual concept is marriage as **Vocation** or call from God.
- This Vocation is supported by the foundation of a *strong marital friendship*, which is built on: a) knowing each other intimately, b) increasing fondness and admiration and c) turning toward vs. turning away.
- The second spiritual concept is marriage as **Covenant**, which is the promise of a special relationship.
- The greatest threat to the Covenant is poorly managed conflict. *Managing conflict* requires skills for both Solvable Problems and Perpetual Problems.
- The third spiritual concept is marriage as **Sacrament**, which sees the relationship as *a sign of God's faithful love*.
- The unity of the Sacrament is intensified by emotional and sexual intimacy and the creating of shared meaning.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

(Facilitator asks following questions, one at a time, and elicits feedback from the large group.)

1. What stayed with you from last session?
2. What was your experience of the homework from last session?

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION 2 [15 minutes]

1. *(Facilitator introduces the theme for today's session, "Marriage As Vocation.")*
2. Song: "Partners on the Journey", verse 2 (from music CD).
3. Warm-up Question: *(Facilitator directs participants to the following warm-up question in the Participant's Booklet. Facilitator directs spouses to answer the question individually and then to discuss the question as a couple for approximately 3 minutes. After couples have discussed their answers, the facilitator elicits responses to the question from the large group.)* **Looking back over your relationship, when did you become aware that you wanted this relationship to lead to marriage?**
 - a. Each participant answers individually in the Participant's Booklet.
 - b. Share answers as a couple (*approximately 3 minutes*).
 - c. Large group feedback (*voluntary sharing of answers by the large group of participants for approximately 5 to 7 minutes*).

VIDEO PRESENTATION [20 minutes]

(The following is a script of the video presentation and intended as a reference for the Facilitator.)

INTRODUCTION (Host)

Hello, and welcome again to the marriage enrichment series, "Partners on the Journey." In our first session, we described this series as an attempt to combine the findings from scientific research about what makes marriages last with spiritual insights into marriage. Today's session will focus on the first key spiritual insight related to marriage, namely, marriage as a vocation. People often think of vocation in a limited sense as a call to ministry or a religious order. However, as we will see in today's session, God created man and woman as partners and called them to join their lives in marriage. In other words, marriage is a calling from God. We refer to such a calling as a vocation.

Vocation: As people of faith, we believe that being drawn to marriage involves more than responding to romantic feelings or physical attraction. While we recognize the importance of this attraction, we believe that there is something deeper at work, namely a "call" from God. That call can be seen in the Creation stories in the book of Genesis at the beginning of the Bible. From those stories, it is obvious that God made man and woman to share life together in marriage. And so, we recognize that marriage is a call from God, a vocation.

Once we realize that we are being called by God, we must choose whether or not to respond to that call. If we choose to respond to God's call, then we are also challenged to undergo a transformation or conversion as a result of responding to that call. This conversion usually takes place gradually over time.

The vocation or call to marriage has several elements and each element leads to a conversion or movement from one way of life to another. In today's session we will outline four elements in the vocation or call to marriage as well as the change or movement that we are challenged to make with each element of that call. We are grateful for the work of James and Evelyn Whitehead, psychologists and theologians, for their insights into the transitions or movements that couples are challenged to make in response to the call from God.

Call to Union: The first element of the call or vocation to marriage is the call to Union. The story of the creation of man and woman, found in Chapter 2 of Genesis, describes how God established the vocation or call to marriage as primarily a call to union. In the Genesis account (Genesis 2: 4-8, 18-24), God creates the man and all of the animals. Then God declares that "it is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a suitable partner". God puts the man into a deep sleep, removes one of his ribs and uses it to form a woman. When the man sees her he exclaims, "this one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," that is, someone who is equal and to whom he can relate. God then declares that the man shall henceforth "leave father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh." Thus, from the beginning, God creates, empowers and calls man and woman to form an intimate bond.

The Bishops of Vatican II echoed that idea when they declared that marriage is a call "to form an intimate community of life and love" (*Gaudium et Spes*, #48).

In response to the call to union, spouses are challenged to grow by moving from a life focused on oneself and one's own needs, to a shared life. The spouses are called to merge their wants, needs and values into a unified whole. They are challenged to move from "I" to "We."

Call to Holiness: The second element of the call to marriage is the call to Holiness. God created human beings out of love and invites each person to love God in return. Since God gained nothing in creating us, the act of creation is a gesture of God's self-giving love, an act of pure generosity. The purpose for which we were created as humans is to recognize and respond to God's generous love by loving God in return. Thus, the fundamental call or vocation of all human beings is the call to love God, who has first loved us.

The Bishops of the Second Vatican Council describe that call to love God as the "call to holiness" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #39) since holiness simply means our closeness or intimacy with God. The Bishops declared that this "call to holiness" is the fundamental and universal call that all believers share.

The call to marriage is connected to that universal vocation or call to holiness, since God not only calls us to holiness but also gives each of us a means to carry out that vocation, that is, a means to achieve holiness. For most believers, that path or means to holiness is through marriage (Catechism #1604). Through the experience of being loved by another person, spouses can come to know what God's love is like. At the same time, spouses learn how they might love God by learning to love another human being with great intensity.

In responding to God's call to holiness through marriage, spouses are challenged to move from seeking self-gratification to seeking the good of one's partner. They are challenged to move from "Self-seeking" to "Self-giving" as a means of growing in holiness.

Call To Wholeness: The third element of the vocation to marriage is the call to Wholeness. God created human beings as male and female so that they might be complimentary as "suitable partners." That "suitableness" or complementarity implies that it is only in relationship that each of us is challenged to truly become our most authentic or "whole" self as God intended us to be.

Relationships, especially the intimate relationship of marriage, can help each of us become "whole" because we each come into adulthood trying to hide, disown or ignore parts of ourselves that were rejected or wounded in childhood. Marriage, then, becomes a crucible that melts away our disguises and defenses in order to expose our authentic self, including both our strengths and our weaknesses. That authentic or whole self can only be seen as each spouse gradually becomes vulnerable to the other. While this task of becoming vulnerable is often frightening and challenging, it is in that vulnerability that God meets us and brings healing. It is in the vulnerability of an intimate relationship that each is made whole by God's love, a love which is experienced through the love of one's partner (Catechism #1606-1608).

Responding to the call to wholeness is a life-long process. Since relationships usually begin with romance, partners often see each other in an idealized way that creates interest and excitement in the early stages of a relationship. This idealized image in the early stages of a relationship is usually unconscious leaving us unaware that it is such a strong factor in our attraction to each other. However, disillusionment often occurs when the idealized image of a partner changes as couples get to know each other more realistically in dealing with the demands of everyday life. As that idealized image fades, spouses are challenged to let go of the idealized image of their spouse, as well as the carefully crafted disguises that each has chosen to hide behind. In letting go of the idealized image and the disguises, couples must now consciously choose to love the flawed, yet still loveable, person of their spouse and even themselves. By consciously choosing to accept and love the limitations of our spouse and our self, we are challenged to move from “Romance” to “Committed Love.” And it is that committed love that allows the marriage to grow and deepen over time.

Call to Generativity: The fourth element in the vocation to marriage is the call to Generativity. God not only calls couples to share love between themselves, but invites spouses to allow their love to generate life beyond themselves. Again, in the Creation story, God commands the couple to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis, 1:28). In doing so, they become co-creators with God, because, like God, they allow their love to move beyond themselves to generate new life.

In responding to the call to generativity or sharing life, couples are challenged to move beyond their focus on one another and allow their love to expand by contributing to and caring for the larger world. This movement begins with the birth of children and the on-going care of them that moves the couple to share beyond themselves. It later moves into care for the larger community and the world. Love must eventually become creative or generative beyond itself for love to endure. We can describe this transition as the movement from “We Are” to “We Care.” In loving beyond themselves, spouses learn to imitate God's love.

SUMMARY

1. Marriage is a Vocation or call from God. There are several elements to that call and each element offers a challenge to change.
2. The first element is a call to **Union**. In responding to that call, we are challenged to move from “**I**” to “**We**.”
3. The second element is the call to **Holiness**. In responding to that call, we are challenged to move from “**Self-seeking**” to “**Self-giving**.”
4. The third element is the call to **Wholeness**. In responding to that call, we are challenged to move from “**Romance**” to “**Committed Love**.”
5. The fourth element is the call to **Generativity**. In responding to that call, we are challenged to move from “**We Are**” to “**We Care**.”

PRESENTERS' DIALOGUE

The realization that marriage is a vocation or call can change our vision of marriage. We can now see marriage as more than a merely human enterprise. We can see marriage as a spiritual undertaking in which God is also a partner in the relationship. This is especially important when the partners are struggling in the relationship since the awareness of their marriage as a call from God gives hope to the partners and empowers them to work on strengthening the relationship rather than abandoning it. Therefore, couples can make God a conscious part of their relationship.

Psychologically, there are several studies that point to stages of development in a marital relationship. Those studies reveal that relationships typically move from unconscious, and instinctual interactions to more conscious and deliberate interactions as the relationship matures and grows. This movement again highlights the theme of this series, which views marriage as a dynamic relationship that fits the image of a journey.

SUMMARY (Host)

The vocation or call to marriage initiates a couple into a life-long process of learning to love and becoming authentic. That life-long process can be compared to a journey upon which a couple embarks without knowing all that they will encounter along the way. They approach the journey together, as companions, offering each other care and encouragement. This marriage enrichment series will attempt to offer couples support for all aspects of God's call, namely, union, holiness, wholeness and generativity. In responding to that call, they become, along with God, "Partners on the Journey". *(End of video presentation)*

BREAK [10 minutes]

(Facilitator invites participants to take a 10-minute break for refreshments and restrooms.)

INTEGRATIVE EXERCISE [25 minutes]

(Facilitator instructs the participants to individually answer the questions below which are found in the Participant's Booklet. After approximately 5 minutes, the Facilitator instructs participants to share their answers with their spouses. After a few minutes of couple sharing, the facilitator elicits for feedback from the large group.)

1. How is your view of your marriage affected by the realization that it is a vocation or calling by God?
2. After hearing the various challenges that are associated with each element of God's call, (see Summary above) how do you think God might be challenging each of you individually to grow at this point in your marriage?

HOMEWORK [5 minutes]

(Facilitator directs couple's attention to the "Homework" page of the Participants' Booklet and reviews the homework instructions.)

Together, decide on which element of God's call (union, holiness, wholeness or generativity) is most challenging to you as a couple and develop a plan of action to respond to that challenge.

PRAYER RITUAL [15 minutes]

(The different elements of the prayer service may be led by the Facilitator or by various participants selected by Facilitator.)

1. Song: "Partners On The Journey" (verse 2)
2. Reading: Ephesians 4: 1-6 "Live a life worthy of your calling."
3. Silent reflection.
4. Scripture reflection: *(Leader reads reflection)* St. Paul urges us to respond to God's call by living a life worthy of that call. Living according to our call means working to "preserve the unity of the spirit." God has called us, so God is with us as the bond of unity through the Holy Spirit.
5. Litany of Vocation: *(Leader invites all to stand. Leader instructs participants to respond to each phrase of the Litany, with, "Yes, Lord, We come to do your will." The Leader reads each phrase of the Litany and participants respond after each phrase.)*

Lord, you call us to share our lives to create "one body", and we respond...

Lord, you call us to give of ourselves in love to grow in holiness, and we respond...

Lord, you call us to grow as authentic persons through our marriage relationship, and we respond...

Lord, you call us to allow our love to overflow into giving and nurturing new life, and we respond...

Lord, you call us to be models of love for the world, and we respond...

Lord, you call us to reflect your self-giving love, and we respond.

6. Closing Prayer: *(The leader invites couples to stand and pray the closing prayer together from the Participant's Booklet.)*

God, our Father and Creator,
you fashioned us out of love,
and call us to imitate your generosity
by giving of ourselves to one another
as husband and wife.
Empower us with your life-giving Spirit
to recognize your call
in our attraction for one another,
and to respond to your call
by becoming our most authentic selves,
reflecting your love
in our care for our children and the world.
We pray this through Him
who embodied your love,
Jesus Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

7. Song: "Partners On The Journey" (verse 2).