

# THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Catechetical Segment for Marriage Preparation



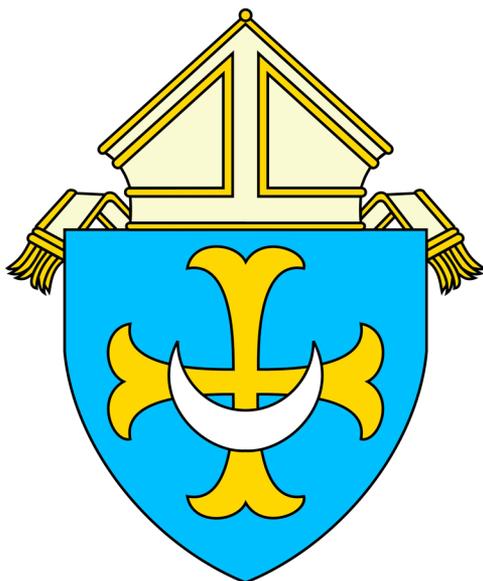
DIOCESE OF TRENTON



BUILDING STRONG

*Marriages*





DIOCESE OF TRENTON  
CATECHETICAL SEGMENT FOR  
MARRIAGE PREPARATION

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# INTRODUCTION

This booklet was developed in response to the diocesan **Plan for Strengthening Marriage** launched in 2015, to assist pastoral ministers to provide a comprehensive catechesis on sacramental marriage to engaged couples.



One of the primary goals of the Study Commission on Marriage was to “improve the effectiveness of marriage preparation so that it is more responsive and relevant to the needs of today’s young adults.” This includes “integrating a comprehensive catechetical segment on sacramental marriage into the sessions for engaged couples” [Plan for Strengthening Marriage, # 4].

May this booklet serve as a helpful resource for all who prepare couples for Catholic marriage in the Diocese of Trenton.





# MARRIAGE AS COVENANT

## KEY POINTS:

**God, the Creator** and Sustainer of the universe, exists in an eternal relationship of unconditional love as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**God, who exists** in a covenantal relationship with his people, created the world and humanity out of a superabundance of love.

**The desire for God's love** is placed in our hearts by God in response to this covenant.

**Because of our human failings**, God sent his only Son to perfect and seal His covenant.

**Jesus' self-giving love** is the model for marital love.

**Married couples** enter a sacred covenant to be faithful to each other unto death.

**Through their love**, married couples make God's covenantal love present in the world.

**The covenant of marriage** is not a private matter between the couple. It is deeply connected to the Church that sustains and nourishes the couple.

**The Holy Spirit** gives couples the grace to sustain their marital covenant.





## **TUTORIAL: WHO IS GOD?**

1. The Triune God, the source of everything in the universe, exists within an eternal loving relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (three persons in one God).

2. The communion of love existing in the Trinity was channeled into creation. God created man and woman as relational beings, and marriage is meant to be a reflection, albeit limited, of the unconditional love of the Trinity.

3. We are made “in the image and likeness of God” [Genesis 1]. We image God through our intellect, free will, and ability to love others. God’s gift of life is synonymous with God’s promise of unconditional love. The sin of Adam and Eve speaks of our free choice to turn away from God’s love. This rupture in the God-human relationship created the need for salvation.

4. Jesus Christ is the total and irrevocable revelation of God. We know God because we know Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. The Father sent his only Son to show us how to live, save us from our sins and open for us the gates of heaven.



## GOD'S COVENANT

5. Salvation History is the story of God's covenant of love, and humanity's free will to accept or reject God's love. The Old Testament writers speak of the covenant God offers to his people through Abraham and Moses. Through this covenant, God places the desire for His love into the heart of every person. In his "Confessions," St. Augustine expressed this longing, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in thee."<sup>1</sup>

6. Scripture relates how Israel repeatedly strayed from the demands of God's covenant and how God always called her to return. [Jeremiah 22:9 and Hosea 2:4]. God still promises Israel a new and everlasting covenant [Jeremiah 31].

7. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the New Covenant. In his life, death and resurrection, He manifests in a definitive way the desire to draw us into a loving relationship with Him and with one another. St. Paul teaches that marriage is a pre-eminent symbol of the covenant which Christ has with his people [Ephesians 5:31-32]. This is because marriage is a commitment by which spouses pledge to each other the entirety of their lives until death. In daily acts of mutual love, kindness, service, and forgiveness, couples imitate, however imperfectly, the love of Christ.

8. The Second Vatican Council [Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] emphasized marriage as a covenant, while not ignoring that marriage also involves contractual obligations between the spouses. Placing covenant at the heart of marriage helps to make all dimensions of a marriage possible.<sup>2</sup>

9. "The covenant that exists between Christ and his Church is sealed with his blood. Jesus gave himself in his ministry of teaching, healing and reconciliation. He was faithful to his commitment of love, even when it meant rejection, suffering and crucifixion. 'No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends' [John. 15:13]. This covenant of love and friendship is sacramentalized in the Eucharist



where Christ continues to offer the gift of himself to us in love. 'This is my body given for you. This is the cup of my blood poured out for you' [Luke 22:19]. To speak of marriage as covenant, then, is to say that it is a commitment of mutual and unlimited love."<sup>3</sup>

10. It is through the Holy Spirit, that a couple is given the grace to sustain their marital covenant, and to help them on the road to salvation. We come to the Holy Spirit through prayer and the sacraments; thus, active involvement in parish life is important.

11. Dr. John Grabowski describes the importance of marriage within the context of the wider community. The "biblical conception of marriage as a covenant was anything but privatized – it was always located in a larger social matrix, whether that of Ancient Israel (in the Old Testament) or the broader Christian community (in the New Testament). This location within God's covenant people was the necessary support and context for the couple's covenantal commitment and communion of love with each other....

...Marriage, for Christians, was never a private enclave in a hostile world but the smallest and most basic form of Christian community –'the domestic Church.' Since spouses cannot provide for all of each other's needs, it is vital that the couple have friendships and the support of the Christian community."<sup>4</sup>

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR COUPLES:**

**Knowing that their lifelong promise** to love and honor each other is given before God, couples can see the sacred and serious nature of their marital commitment.

**Jesus' example of loving service**, healing, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and friendship, shows couples how to live out their covenant of marriage.

**With the support of family**, friends, mentor couples, and their parish community, couples can sustain their relationship in "good times and in bad." There is no shame in seeking help when it is needed.



**The marriage covenant is indissoluble.** A valid Catholic marriage is permanent, faithful, and exclusive. The sacred vows are the public promise of covenantal love. When both spouses decide to live their vows each day and allow God to protect their marital bond, divorce is not an option.

**Practicing the disciplines of the cardinal virtues** will enable a couple to live out their vows on a daily basis:

- Courage - pursuing difficult goals and resisting attractive evils
- Temperance - shaping desires toward proper goals
- Justice - giving what is owed to God and others
- Prudence - choosing the best course of action

**Gratitude for God's gifts**, especially the unique gift that is one's spouse, is essential. Life is more joyful when couples are grateful for God's gifts. Overcoming difficulties together also becomes a great source of joy.

### **COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. What do you think are necessary qualities to live out the promises of your marriage covenant?
2. What are some things you might do that could strengthen your covenant? What are those behaviors or activities that might weaken your covenant?
3. Where would you turn for help when you experience difficulties in your marriage?
4. Why are prayer and the sacraments necessary to keep your covenant strong? What resources might you find at your parish to strengthen and sustain your marriage covenant?



<sup>1</sup>Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5

<sup>2</sup>Paragraph's 5-7 taken from "Marriage as Covenant," Foryourmarriage.org, USCCB, copyright 2016

<sup>3</sup>"Toward a Post-Vatican II Spirituality of Marriage," William P. Roberts

<sup>4</sup>"Marriage as a Unitive and Procreative Partnership," John S. Grabowski, Ph. D., copyright 2005





# PERMANENCE IN MARRIAGE

## KEY POINTS:

**Marriage is a permanent,** lifelong commitment.

**Marriage reflects God's** perpetual love for creation.

**Marriage signifies Christ's** self-emptying love for the Church.

**The consent exchanged by the couple** is sealed by God.

**A sacramental marriage** is a sign of the New Covenant, established by Christ.

## TUTORIAL:

12. Before a bride and groom exchange their vows in the Catholic Rite of Marriage, they are asked, among others, the following question: "Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?"<sup>5</sup> The required answer is "I am." In that answer, the bride and groom announce publicly their intention to enter a permanent marriage.

### **Their marriage must be permanent, because:**

- God's own love is permanent;
- God's love for all creation is permanent;
- Christ's love for the Church is permanent;



- The bride and groom commit themselves to making this love known, through their behavior to each other and all those they meet.

13. God first showed his love and wisdom by creating the universe and everything in it. God created Adam and Eve, our first parents, in his own image. They were able to love as God loves before the Fall because they were fully integrated human persons – mind, body and spirit, and they saw and knew each other fully, with complete intimacy, just as God knows each of us. After the Fall, when sin entered the world, the integrity of the human person was ruptured, and humanity was no longer able to love fully as God loves. Human relationships were tainted by Original Sin which made salvation necessary.

14. Yet as scripture tells us, from the very beginning, God continued to offer his covenant of love but his people rejected it. Despite their infidelity, God remained ever-faithful to his people, always demonstrating the permanence of His covenant and His plan for salvation.

15. The prophets, particularly Hosea, often portrayed God's love for Israel as a husband's relentless love for his wife: "I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord." [Hosea 2:21]

16. Finally, Jesus sealed the covenant between God and his people through his death in the cross. The Church, established by Christ, carries forward Christ's mission of love. The sacraments strengthen the faithful in fulfilling Christ's commandment of love.

17. During his ministry Jesus taught that marriage is permanent. He explained to the Pharisees who asked about the lawfulness of divorce, that "what God has joined together, man must not separate." When they pressed him about Moses permitting a decree of divorce, Jesus replied that it was "because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." [Matthew 19:3-8]



18. Marriage has been established by God the creator; it possesses its own laws and is endowed with that blessing which was not forfeited by original sin. This sacred bond, therefore, does not depend on human choice, but rather on God, the Author of marriage, who endowed it with its own goods and ends.

19. Christ willed that marriage be restored to its primordial form and holiness so that what God has joined together, no one may put asunder. He raised it to the dignity of a Sacrament so that it might signify more clearly his covenant with the Church.

20. The consent exchanged by the couple is sealed by God. From their covenant arises “an institution, confirmed by divine law, even in the eyes of society” [CCC #1639]. Thus the marriage bond has been established by God in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between two baptized persons can never be dissolved.



## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR COUPLES:

**Catholic couples promise** to love and honor each other, in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, for all the days of their lives. But when reality sets in and the inevitable problems and struggles happen, couples need more than the remembrance of their vows to get them through. Sacramental grace, which acts as the glue to hold the couple together, is always available to them so they can make the daily decision to love.

**By thanking God daily** for all of His gifts, couples begin to see all aspects of their lives as a way to get closer to God. By thanking God for their spouse, their love grows stronger.

**Daily prayer enables couples** to invite God into their relationship so that their marriage and family life can become holy.

**With the grace to forgive and be forgiven,** couples can grow from conflict.

**When couples unite** their inevitable struggles with the cross, their suffering is redemptive and their marriage is strengthened.

## COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the modern, secular view of marriage affect your understanding of the permanence of your own relationship?
2. What support for your relationship are you receiving and/or seeking from relatives, friends and your local parish?
3. What help can you or your parish provide for other couples, especially those who are struggling with permanence in their marriage?

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<sup>5</sup>Order of Celebrating Matrimony, editio typica altera, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015, #94.

<sup>6</sup># 18 and 19 above from The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, #4, 5





# MARRIAGE AS PARTNERSHIP

## KEY POINTS:

**According to the Catechism**, Marriage is a “partnership of the whole of life” [CCC#1601]. Married couples are called to the deepest level of intimacy and friendship – a one-flesh union.

**The marital partnership** is more than a union in one flesh; it is also a union of heart and soul.

**Partnership in marriage** presupposes a deep and abiding friendship between the spouses. Spouses seek the good of each other, share interests, and genuinely enjoy spending time together.

**Husband and wife** are equal in dignity. Partnership implies mutual submission to Christ and mutual authority in the work of marriage.

**True unity in marriage** is made possible both by their bodily structure (sexual difference) and their unique relationship with God, the foundation of all human relationships.

## TUTORIAL:

21. “Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’ The woman, ‘flesh of his flesh,’ his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a ‘helpmate’; she thus represents God from whom comes our help.



‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.’ The Lord Himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been ‘in the beginning...so they are no longer two, but one flesh” [CCC #1605].

22. Marriage is a “partnership of the whole of life.” Couples share in each other’s joys, comfort each other in difficulties, and walk the road toward salvation together. They share the deepest intimacies of marital communion in words, deeds, and the sacred body language of sexual union.

23. Marriage implies a deep and abiding friendship – enjoying each other’s company in all the activities of daily family life. Couples who enjoy each other as inseparable friends will be able to withstand difficulties and grow from marital challenges. The “staying power” so characteristic of true friendship assists the spouses to live in that union intended by God, that “two become one” [Genesis 2:24]. Nothing as important as friendship can be built up easily. The lover who chooses to build a lasting marriage invests his or her full energy in cultivating a loving friendship.

24. Marriage involves the sharing of the whole of a person’s life with his/her spouse. Marriage calls for a mutual self-surrender so intimate that spouses – without losing their individuality – become “one,” not only in body, but in soul. Pope Benedict wrote of the movement from romantic love to a deeper marital friendship in his first encyclical, *God Is Love* - “Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking into the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: love becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even, willing to sacrifice.”[*Deus Caritas Est*, #6]

25. Marriage is the partnership of a man and woman equal in dignity. This does not imply sameness in roles or expectations. There are important physical and psychological traits which result in differing skills and perspectives. A couple that accepts their equality as a son



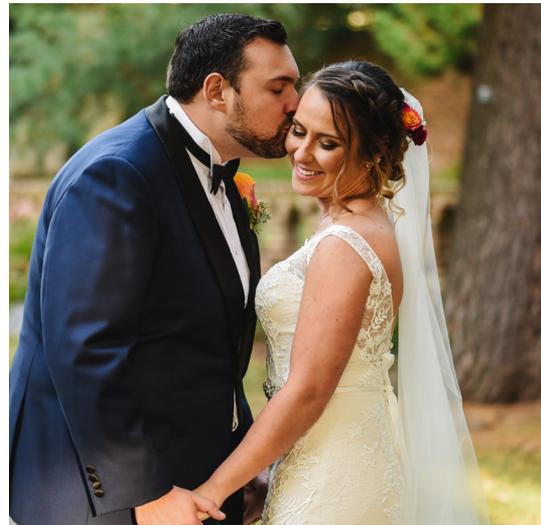
and daughter of God will honor and cherish one another's gifts and individuality.

26. Mutual submission – not dominance by either partner – is the key to genuine joy in marriage. True equality, understood as mutuality, is not measuring out household tasks or maintaining an orderly schedule. Marriage thrives where the power of the Holy Spirit resides. Grace not only makes the shedding of selfishness possible, but also leads to a joyful willingness.<sup>8</sup>

27. St. John Paul II taught that the mutual character of marital authority is part of the “ethos of redemption,”<sup>9</sup> which means that married couples have a mutual sharing in the mission of salvation. He understood that this was an important development in Catholic doctrine - that marriage must be understood as a partnership in the fullest sense.

28. Married couples are not only equal in dignity and in fundamental human rights, but also in their exercise of authority. Yet this equality does not diminish the importance of sexual difference, and the essential complementary roles of a mother and father in the family. In this vein St. John Paul II spoke of the irreducible originality of women and men - not just in their embodiment but in the whole of their personal existence.

29. To hold that men and women exercise equal authority in the marriage relationship requires careful attention to the communication skills and patterns of decision-making. In order for couples to live this kind of mutuality they must honestly share their views and learn to make decisions together on a host of issues ranging from finances, to scheduling their time, to investing in their spiritual lives, to raising their children.



30. It may well be that because of temperament or personal gifts one spouse may choose to cede an area of responsibility to his or her mate. However, there are also matters of such importance that cannot be delegated in this way such as raising children who need both a mother and a father.

31. In a true partnership, the marriage comes before all other relationships. All healthy, successful marriages involve dying to self, sacrificial love, forgiveness, and a daily decision to love. Through these aspects of marriage, couples cooperate with God's grace and are strengthened by it.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR COUPLES:**

**Every marriage is tested daily;** however, a true partnership enables couples to determine goals together. Every major decision must be made together (finances, Natural Family Planning, childrearing, holidays, work schedules, and quality time). One person should never make all the decisions. A partnership values both opinions, even if there is a disagreement.

**Household tasks must be handled equally.** When responsibilities are one sided, resentment and anger can easily arise.

**Couples should keep the love alive!** They should not fall into a trap of complacency where a spouse feels unwanted or neglected. Despite busy schedules couples should make the time to go out on dates in accord with what their means permit. There are numerous opportunities to keep the marriage fresh and intimate without a financial or time consuming burden.

**Couples should keep intimacy alive** in their marriage. Sexual intimacy is often the first area to fall by the wayside, especially when children arrive. Sexual intimacy is a gift from God. The joining of heart and body helps marriage endure. "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" [Genesis 2:24].

**Couples should keep their marriage private.** Lives are very often open books especially through social media. There is no need to have every detail of married life on public display.



After an argument, it is tempting to go running to family and friends, but boundaries should exist for what is shared. Arguments are best kept within the home.

**Couples should never forget** why they fell in love. It is helpful to reflect often with gratitude for those things that cultivated mutual love.

**The Church wants to be part of marriage**, not just the wedding. Couples should attend Mass regularly, live a sacramental life and become involved in parish life.

### **COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. In what specific ways will you ensure that your marriage is a true partnership?
2. How would you describe the best kind of marital friendship? What specific steps will you take to make your friendship a priority?
3. How will you make sure you're on the same page about what you value most, and about your immediate and long term goals?
4. Have you discussed the sharing of household chores and finances?



<sup>7</sup>#24 taken from "A Basic Theology of Marriage," Christopher West

<sup>8</sup># 25 and 26 above taken from "Follow the Way of Love," U. S. Catholic Bishops, copyright 1994

<sup>9</sup>"Theology of the Body," St. John Paul II General Audience, 1980





# MARRIAGE AS SACRAMENT

## KEY POINTS:

**Marriage is recognized by the Church** as one of the seven sacraments – it is a visible sign of the invisible reality of Christ's love; it is a sacred union ordained by God that was raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament, and it gives grace.

**It is the couple themselves who are the ministers** of the sacrament – they marry each other; the priest or deacon serves as the official witness of the Church.

**Valid Catholic marriage** requires couples to marry in the presence of a Catholic bishop; or a priest or deacon delegated by either the pastor or bishop, and two witnesses.

**A sacramental marriage** is conferred by a man and woman who are both baptized. Valid Catholic marriage between a baptized Catholic and an unbaptized person forms a sacred bond, but it is not a sacrament.

**Marriage is a path toward holiness** for the couple and their children.

**Couples receive grace to “do” the work of marriage**, and to make the daily decision to love each other even in difficulties.

**Sacramental marriage** implies that the couple will practice their faith and be active members of a parish community.

## TUTORIAL:

### DEFINING SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE



32. In the sacrament of marriage a baptized man and woman vow their love in an exclusive, permanent, sexual partnership. A promise is made before God and the Church and consummated by the bodily (one-flesh union) of the couple. This union is marked by love, respect, care and concern, and a commitment to shared responsibility in the raising of a family if God should bless them with children.

33. Christian marriage is an extraordinary sign of God working through and in the ordinary. Marriage is not merely a civil contract but also a holy covenant involving three persons: the husband, the wife, and Jesus Christ, who promises to bless and sustain the union.

34. Once the bond is consummated, an irrevocable, perpetual, and exclusive bond results between the spouses. The Lord showers their relationship with his graces to perfect their love and strengthen their unity. A couple seeks to attain holiness of life through their faithful life together and their efforts to raise their children according to the law of Christ and his Church.

35. While marriage existed before the time of Christ in what is termed "natural marriage," Christ made something more of it. He raised it to a "super natural" level - a sacrament. Christ would have marriage reflect the love he showed for the Church through the cross. St. Paul described the Church as the "bride" of Christ [Ephesians 5].

36. Marriage is a path to holiness. "Spouses... are consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament; [they] are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God"  
[Gaudiun et Spes].

37. A true (valid) marriage for a Catholic requires that each spouse declare publicly their intention to enter a lifelong, loving marriage of their own free choice and be open to children. Moreover, in order for the marriage to be valid according to Church law, it must be celebrated with the "proper form" that is, witnessed by an authorized priest



or deacon and two witnesses. This is necessary for the following reasons:

- As a sacrament, it is proper that marriage is celebrated within the Church's liturgy;
- Marriage introduces one into the ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards children;
- Witnesses are required to verify that the marriage has taken place;
- The public character of the consent helps spouses remain faithful to it;
- The presence of the priest or deacon ensures that the ceremony is conducted according to the proper form, and that the Church's blessing and promise of support is given.

38. All sacraments require the proper matter and form. Matter refers to the materials used and actions carried out during the administration of the sacrament. Form refers to the words that are used for the rite. While other prayers and rituals may be included in the celebration, these do not affect the sacrament. The matter of the sacrament of Matrimony consists of a man and a woman who are free to marry in the Church expressing their marital consent. Their consent is the essential element of marriage. Consent is expressed by pronouncing the vows or by responding "I do" to the questions posed by the priest or deacon.

## **SACRAMENTAL GRACE IN MARRIAGE**

39. Sanctifying Grace is God's very own way of living, of knowing, and of loving, in us. But it is not a kind of cloak placed around our souls, leaving the nature of the soul untouched; it is a reality in the soul which transforms it intrinsically.

40. Sanctifying Grace is God's life within us that not only makes our being supernatural, but gives us power to act in a divine, supernatural way. Grace is a dynamic reality that enables us to "walk in newness of life." In order to share in this life, we must enter into the life, passion and death of



**In summary, three things are needed for a true (valid) Catholic marriage: Capacity, Consent and Canonical Form:**

1. Capacity includes:
  - Psychological capacity (emotional maturity and stability)
  - Physical capacity (ability to perform the sexual act, and the duties of marriage)
  - Freedom from impediments such as a prior marriage
2. Consent to a marriage that is:
  - Lifelong (permanent)
  - Exclusive (forsaking all others)
  - Open to children
3. Canonical Form:
  - To be married in the presence of a Catholic bishop; or a priest or deacon delegated by either the pastor or bishop, and two witnesses according to the Order of Celebrating Matrimony.

Christ, through the Sacraments, the channels of sanctifying grace.

41. Grace flows to us through the Sacraments that “contain the grace which they signify” [CCC #1127]. Hence, each Sacrament gives a specific sort of sanctifying grace according to the end or object of the respective Sacraments. This is conferred specifically by each Sacrament in order to obtain a special effect that is called sacramental grace.

42. The sacrament of marriage is the imprint of God on the souls of the married couple, not merely in order to sanctify their lifelong union; it is a seed sown in the soul bearing fruit through the whole of married life. Through the divine action of sacramental grace, they have something in their souls that truly unites them.

43. By raising Matrimony to the dignity of a true sacrament, [Christ] made it a sign and source of that peculiar internal grace by which “it perfects natural love, confirms an indissoluble union, and sanctifies both man and wife” [Casti



Connubii]. As Saint Augustine teaches, just as by Baptism and Holy Orders a man is set aside and assisted either for the duties of Christian life or for the priestly office and is never deprived of their sacramental aid, almost in the same way (although not by a sacramental character) the faithful once joined by marriage ties can never be deprived of the help and binding force of the sacrament.

44. The sacrament of marriage confers a strict right to all the actual graces necessary to lead a Christian conjugal life. It also confers the right to all the material and spiritual helps required for the establishment of a home. Since actual grace enlightens the mind and moves the will, a married couple can expect God to inspire them to know what they should understand and do in a given case and to strengthen their will to carry it out. A married pair who stirs up the grace of God within them can await with certainty the right answers. Moreover, when they feel inadequate to the task of the moment they can expect new courage.<sup>10</sup>

45. Living a life-long, faithful and loving marriage is no small task due to the flaw of human nature. Sacramental grace “is intended to perfect the couple’s love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity” [CCC #1641].

46. In one sense, matrimony’s sacramental grace can be understood as a gift bestowed upon the couple. A gift requires the recipient to open and use it. The strength that the grace imparts requires that the couple respond to its promptings.

47. When their relationship gets strained, when family difficulties arise, when couples struggle for the right thing to say to each other, they can invoke matrimonial grace to provide some needed help. This is done by a simple movement of the will to access the grace. Grace is not magic, of course, but tapping into grace allows them to be open to God’s guidance and brings Him in as a partner in their relationship.



## Actual Grace versus Sanctifying Grace:

We first receive sanctifying grace in Baptism, which removes original sin and gives us supernatural life. Sanctifying grace stays in the soul and makes it holy. We can only lose this grace through mortal sin, but with true repentance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, this supernatural (divine) life is restored.

Actual grace is a supernatural “push” or encouragement from God. It doesn’t reside in the soul but acts on the soul from the outside. It moves the will and intellect to seek out and keep sanctifying grace.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR COUPLES:

**Engaged couples are highly influenced** by the current culture of secularism, individualism, materialism and instant gratification in all aspects of their lives. When couples begin to understand the sacramental nature of marriage, they can begin to trust that God has a plan for their marriage.

**Young couples should appreciate** the value of community support available to them through their parish. No one can go it alone; a support system for the important aspects of daily life is essential.

**Through involvement in parish life**, couples can turn to experienced couples to accompany them through the challenges of married life, and share their joys. Such mentoring relationships are beneficial.

**A thorough understanding of sacramental marriage** enables couples to access the grace they need for marriage. Couples who truly understand what they are consenting to at the altar will respond differently to each other, asking for God’s help through regular prayer, and make the decision to love each day even when it seems impossible.

**The grace of marriage** is absolutely essential for happy, healthy, lifelong marriage. Couples should be strongly encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the wedding to ensure they are in a state of grace, and that the grace of the sacrament of Matrimony will be fully



accessible to them. Providing an opportunity for sacramental confession at the wedding rehearsal might prompt all Catholic members of the wedding party to receive the sacrament.

**All sacramental marriages have a mission** – to bring Christ’s love to the world. Realizing this compels couples to devote time and energy to their marriage and continually re-assess goals in light of the Gospel. The mission adds meaning and purpose to their lives. Grace enables the couple to trust in God and discern His will, and gives them the supernatural ability to “do” the work of marriage, even in the darkest times.

### **COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. How has God acted in your life leading you to become engaged?
2. How has your love mirrored Christ’s love for us?
3. In what aspect of your life together do you think you’ll need God’s grace the most?
4. In what specific ways will you bring Christ’s love into the world?
5. What do you think it means to have a sacramental marriage, and how does this differ from civil marriage?
6. Knowing that sacramental marriage is exclusive, permanent and open to life, how does that make you feel as you approach your marriage?
7. If you were to write a mission statement for your marriage, what would it say?

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<sup>10</sup>Paragraphs #39 through 44 above taken from “Sacramental Grace in Marriage,” Henry V. Sattler, C.S.S.R, National Catholic Conference on Family Life, 1956





## MARRIAGE CONTINUES CREATION

### KEY POINTS:

**The conjugal union of husband and wife** is sacred and achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. The unitive and creative aspects of the act are inseparable and are both inherent to the marriage act [CCC #2366].

**Called to give life**, spouses are cooperators with the love of God the Creator [CCC #2367].

**Children, the crowning glory of creation**, are a gift from God. **Contrary to the ideas that children are a burden** to be avoided and that couples should have as many children as possible, the Church calls parents to exercise responsible parenthood.

**Parents are the first and foremost teachers of the faith.** The family is where children encounter Christ, and the home should be a Church in miniature – a domestic Church.

**Families have a duty to the Church and society.** They make God's love present in service to others.

### TUTORIAL:

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEXUAL ENCOUNTER IN MARRIAGE

48. "According to God's will, husband and wife should encounter each other in bodily union (one-flesh union)



so as to be united ever more deeply with one another in love and to allow children to proceed from their love” [Amoris Laetitia #74].

49. In Christianity, the body, pleasure and erotic joy enjoy a high status (God took on a human body). The sexual relationship is seen as sacred body language, a way to express the deep, unconditional, indissoluble love of married persons. Sex outside of marriage contradicts and devalues the true meaning of the sexual act, and goes against the dignity of the human person. The level of sexual intimacy should always match the level of commitment; therefore, the sexual relationship is reserved for the lifetime commitment of marriage.

50. The sexual relationship of the couple should be nurtured and protected within the marriage; it is what makes marriage unique among all other human relationships, and what enables couples to be co-creators with God. Sexual intercourse takes on a deep theological meaning when understood as the profound sign of the one-flesh union in marriage – the definitive expression of the marriage commitment. It is a sign that encompasses and sums up the whole reality of the joining of two lives in marriage.

51. When a husband and wife consummate their marriage, the “form” and “matter” of the sacrament are united. The words of the wedding vows become flesh. This means that every time a husband and wife have sexual intercourse they are meant to be renewing their wedding vows. “Marital consent ...finds its fulfillment in the ‘two becoming one flesh” [CCC #1627].

52. “The human body, with its sex – masculinity and femininity – seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and of procreation, as in the natural order, but contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is, the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and – through this gift – fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence” [Theology of the Body 15:1].



## RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

53. Responsible parenthood is based on the notion that couples, in cooperation with God's plan for life and love, bring as many children into the world as they can raise and nurture to maturity and independence. The Church affirms the couple's right, within the context of Natural Family Planning (NFP), to determine by themselves the number of their children and the distance between births.

54. A Christian married couple has as many children as God gives them and as they can take responsibility for, given the health of each spouse and their social and economic situation. Christian married couples should be responsible in using the gift and privilege of transmitting life. The criteria for regulating birth is avoiding conception for good, not selfish reasons, without external coercion, and using means that are morally acceptable in the Church.

55. Because the family has a mission to bring God's love to the world, the Church hopes that Christian married couples will generously and courageously welcome children into their family.

56. The Church supports the use of scientific-based methods of self-observation of the signs and symptoms of fertility known as Natural Family Planning (NFP), as morally acceptable in keeping with the dignity of man and woman, respecting the natural, healthy functioning of the female body, and demanding mutual affection and consideration [CCC #2370-2372, 2399]. NFP is ecological, holistic, healthy, and an exercise in partnership.

57. The Church rejects all artificial means of contraception – namely chemical methods (“the Pill”), mechanical methods (condom, IUD), and surgical methods (sterilization), as these methods separate the sexual act from its procreative potential, block the total self-giving of husband and wife, can be detrimental to the woman's health, can have an abortifacient effect, and can be detrimental to the couple's relationship.



58. Married couples who experience infertility can accept medical assistance that does not contradict the dignity of the human person, the rights of the child to be conceived, and the holiness of the Sacrament of Matrimony [CCC #2375, 2379]. Natural Procreative Technology (NaPro Technology) addresses the root causes of infertility and often enables couples to conceive naturally.

59. All assistance in conceiving a child through research and medicine must be stopped when the generative bond of conception and parenthood is broken by a third person or when conception becomes a technological act outside of sexual union in marriage [CCC #2374, 2377].

60. Children should originate from the loving union of husband and wife rather than as a product of a technological procedure. Married couples who have exhausted all permissible medical means of assistance can adopt, take in foster children, or become involved in some other way of the caretaking of children.

### **THE FAMILY AS DOMESTIC CHURCH**

61. Children are entrusted to the protection and care of parents, and have the same human dignity [CCC #2201-2206, 2249]. God in the depths of the Trinity is communion. In the human sphere, the family is the primordial image of communion. According to St. John Paul II, the family's first task is to form a community of persons.

62. The family is the unique school of living in relationships, where children and parents experience affection and mutual respect. The primary duty of parents is to present the Gospel and communicate the Faith to their children.

63. Parents should make it possible for children to experience the familiar presence of the loving God. Family members should pray for each other, help strengthen one another's faith, and collaborate in works of charity.

64. Catholic marriage is a vocation of service lived out in daily life. The marital partnership calls couples to be a total gift to each other, their children, parish and their civic community.



65. Families image the Church by praying together, sharing stories, forgiving and sacrificing for each other, and in their love for one another [Amoris Laetitia # 29, 30]. Catholic families have a mission to create new disciples and help build God's Kingdom on earth.

66. Marriage and the family are the chief social institutions that must be supported and strengthened. All people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

67. "While building up the Church in love, the Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world, really bringing about...human advancement... Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to the community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of its responsibility towards the whole of society" [Familiaris Consortio #64].

68. We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored [USCCB, Catholic Social Teaching].

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR COUPLES:**

**The sacred nature of marriage's** sexual relationship differs vastly from the secular understanding of sex that pervades our culture, where sex is viewed as a means of self-gratification devoid of love and commitment. Appreciating the importance and sacredness of the sexual relationship, a couple's lovemaking reaches a new level of understanding and fulfillment.

**Sexual exclusivity means** that all aspects of sexual fulfillment happen within the protective confines of the marital relationship. Pornography is in common usage but is an absolute form of infidelity, and very damaging to trust and intimacy.



**Marriage continues creation.** When children are regarded as the supreme gift of marriage, generosity increases. Couples need to discuss their plans for children, and continue these discussions throughout the fertile years of marriage.

**Responsible parenthood is a couple's right and duty.** If they are blessed with children, they are entrusted with the decision as to how many children to have, and choosing a natural method of family planning to space them.

**New technological methods for fertility awareness** make natural methods of family planning more attractive to couples. The increase in infertility due to environmental causes is a concern for many couples. There are also concerns about the side effects of contraceptive methods. Couples are far more open today than in the past to learning a method of Natural Family Planning.

**When families make the practice of the faith** a priority and become actively involved in the parish, they find the support and resources to sustain them.

**Families that recognize the action of God** in their lives begin to see their family as a domestic Church. They become more grateful for their blessings, and aware of the need for the sacraments and daily prayer.

**When families contribute to the building** up of a better society, they are serving God. Catholic Social Teaching makes clear our responsibility to care for society and protect the earth and its resources.

### **COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Have you discussed how many children you hope to have, and when you hope to have them? What does this mean for your careers and financial goals?
2. Are you prepared if God chooses to bless you with a special-needs child? Are you prepared to deal with the possibility of infertility?
3. Are you willing to explore the latest methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP)?
4. In what ways will NFP help you to better appreciate the privilege of being co-creators with God?



5. Have you discussed how you will raise your children in the faith? Are you willing to make the sacrifices necessary to make the practice of your Catholic faith a priority?

6. Are you still in awe of all of God's gifts or have they become commonplace or boring? How will you convey that awe to your children?

7. How do you see yourselves serving your parish together as a married couple? How do you see your family contributing to a better society?



## REFERENCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Sacrament of Matrimony #1601-1666; The Family #2201-2248; Male and Female He Created Them # 2331-2336; The Love of Husband and Wife (Sexuality, Responsible Parenthood, Sterility) #2360-2379; In Brief #2392-2400

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love, Pope Francis, 2016.**

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf)

**Catholic Social Teaching**

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm>

**Familiaris Consortio, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, St. John Paul II, 1981.**

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html)

**Natural Family Planning Resources**

[www.dioceseoftrenton.org/natural-family-planning](http://www.dioceseoftrenton.org/natural-family-planning)

**Natural Procreative Technology**

<https://www.naprotechnology.com/>

**Love and Life in the Divine Plan, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, copyright 2009.**

<http://www.usccb.org/upload/marriage-love-life-divine-plan-2009.pdf>

**Theology of the Body, General Audiences, St. John Paul II, 1979-1984.**

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2TBIND.HTM>

**The Diocese of Trenton Marriage-Strengthening Initiative**

[www.BuildingStrongMarriages.org](http://www.BuildingStrongMarriages.org)



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While it is intended to be used by trained pastoral ministers who contribute directly to the preparation of engaged couples for Catholic Marriage, the thorough marriage catechesis provided in this booklet can be useful for any parish staff member or ministry volunteer. It can also be given to married couples in the parish who are seeking a deeper understanding of sacramental marriage, or engaged couples who are interested in further study.

This document is available for download on the diocesan website at [www.dioceseoftrenton.org/marriageresources](http://www.dioceseoftrenton.org/marriageresources).

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### **Yours in Christ,**

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