

Suggested
Session Outlines
For Sponsor Couple Programs
2009



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE
Division of Evangelization and Catechesis
Marriage and Family Enrichment

Preparing for Session 1

1. Phone contact with couple assigned by the Parish Coordinator for Marriage Prep
2. Receive Marriage Prep Materials packet from parish.
3. Couple may apply to take the FOCCUS ONLINE before your first meeting.
 - a. Introduce the FOCCUS – it is not a test but an “inventory”.
 - b. Excellent tool to help stimulate discussion
 - c. Important to answer for themselves, NOT what they think their future spouse would want them to answer. Work separately, then discuss after submitting responses. Results will be emailed to Sponsor Couple for discussion.
 - d. Use yellow application form in the packet to apply for a FOCCUS session to be set up for this couple. Each session is pre-paid (with packet) and unique to the couple.
 - e. Choose to have the Log-In Passwords sent directly to the couple or to the Sponsor Couple to distribute. (Sponsor Couple will be copied on email to the couple.)
 - f. Mail or fax the FOCCUS application or call in the application information.
 - g. Allow a few days for the session to be set up and log-in information sent to the designated person(s).
 - h. After the couple completes the FOCCUS, the Sponsor Couple will receive the results
4. Set up a date for the first session in your home. Each session should be about 1 ½ - 2 hours.
5. Your resources:
 - a. Perspectives on Marriage Leader Guide (blue)
 - b. Leaders’ Toolbox online at <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/index.cfm>
 - c. U.S. Catholic website, www.foryourmarriage.org

Session 1

Getting Acquainted / Goals for Marriage Prep

6. Introduce Yourself
 - a. Put the engaged couple at ease
 - b. Use first names
7. Open all sessions with prayer. See Leaders’ Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/prayer/index.cfm> Draw the couple into active participation.
8. Welcome & affirmation
 - a. Interested in their marriage not their wedding
 - b. Explain you are not professionals
 - c. Goal to make the couple feel comfortable
 - d. Ask what made them select sponsor couple

- e. Ask about their expectations
9. Share your story Leaders' Toolbox <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/ministry/share.cfm>
- a. How long you've been married
 - b. How you met
 - c. Number of children
 - d. Why you are a Sponsor Couple
 - e. Define Christian Marriage – we want this for you. We will explore this in the course of the meetings.
 - a. Life-long
 - b. Faithful/exclusive
 - c. Open to children
 - f. Purpose of marriage preparation
 - Help the couple in their life long committed relationship with God and one another
10. Couple tell their story
- a. Ask the couple how they met
 - b. How long they've been engaged
 - c. Ask about the wedding plans
 - d. Family background
 - e. Careers
 - f. Define & discuss “Love” – 1 Cor 13:4-7. *Leader's Toolbox* <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/commitment/vocation-love.cfm>
 - g. Ask the couple what they think love is
 - h. Read 1 Cor 13:4-7
 - i. Re-read with “I” in place of the word “love”
 - j. Love is a decision not an emotion
 - k. Christian principles for a marital relationship: love, respect, mercy, trust
 - l. Marriage as a symbol of Christ's redemptive love for the Church
 - m. Three kinds of love
 - Philos – brotherly or friendship love
 - Agape – altruistic – willing to give life
 - Eros – sexual love
 - n. Role of husband and wife: mutuality (“Seek to outdo the other in kindness.” Philippians 2)
 - A husband should love his wife as Christ loved the Church and gave His life for it
 - A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord
 - o. Three basic commands of God for marriage
 - Leave
 - Cleave
 - Be one flesh
3. Commitment
- a. Contract vs. Covenant Marriage

Contracts:

- Deals with things
- Engages the services of people
- Can be broken with loss to contracting party
- Can be coerced

b. Covenant

- Deals with people
- Engages persons
- Guaranteed by God
- Cannot be broken
- Requires free consent

c. Cohabitation (if applicable) *Perspectives* Leaders' Guide p. 40

- a. Marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the church, which is not a temporary or "trial" union, but on which is eternally faithful. – Pope John Paul II
- b. Express the Church's concerns in a sensitive way
- c. See Leaders' Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/commitment/cohabit.cfm>
- d. We want your marriage to last forever
- e. Allow yourself the space needed to be more objective about your relationship

d. Apply to take the FOCCUS (if not done before Session One). See above.

e. (If the FOCCUS is done and results are in hand, begin to discuss the results with the couple.)

f. Next meeting dates

- a. Outline the four remaining sessions

Communication

Decision Making & Problem Solving

Marital Intimacy

Spirituality & Children

- b. Get the calendar out
- c. Work backwards from the wedding. If possible schedule session 5 at least four weeks before the wedding. Schedule sessions about 3-4 weeks apart
- d. Make sure you have at least 2 weeks between Session 1 and 2 to allow for FOCCUS processing (if the FOCCUS is not yet completed)
- e. If you have to double up sessions – sessions 4 and 5 are easy to combine. Recommend session 2 and 3 remain separate

g. Closing Prayer: A scripture reading or short prayer is appropriate

Session 2

Communication

1. Opening Prayer: Scripture reading or short prayer
2. FOCCUS
 - a. Review results of the FOCCUS with the couple. It is best to keep the report in your lap while you discuss. Loan the Inventory Statement booklets to the couple and refer to statements on which they did not agree, especially Key Questions.
3. Family of Origin – Perspectives Leaders’ Guide, p. 32
 - a. Important to have sensitivity to situations of "absent" parent(s)
 - b. Major influence on my learning to be a spouse and what I expect in a spouse
 - c. I may be more like my same sex parent than I might like to believe.
 - d. Women
 - Are more comfortable in intimate relationships
 - Emotional manager
 - Approach rooted in how little girls play
 - e. Men
 - Are reluctant to dive head-first into emotional issues
 - Taught to suppress emotions
 - The game is more important than the interaction.
 - Told “Don’t cry when you get hurt”
 - f. Expectations brought into marriage
 - Economic background
 - Family traditions
 - Upbringing
 - Ethnic background
 - Sexual differences
 - Personal strengths and weakness
4. Communication – See Toolbox for Marriage Prep Leaders,
<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/communication/index.cfm>
 - a. Different doesn't mean wrong- it only means different.
 - b. The differences are not insurmountable, but must be met head on.
 - c. Give focused attention.
 - d. Use reflective listening.
 - e. Identify content.
 - f. Respond with empathy.
 - g. Technique for active listening
 - One person talks – one person listens.
 - Listener repeats issues, ideas, and feelings.
 - Reverse the process.
 - h. Levels of Communication
 - Personal sharing – sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings
 - Discussion – sharing ideas
 - Arguing – healthiest method of dealing with differences

Brings a new understanding
Helps a relationship grow
Indifference is the real enemy of love.
Fighting – harmful because there must be a winner and a loser
Abuse may be psychological, emotional, and physical.
Calling of names
Leaves scars

5. Listen, clarify, and respond

- a. Share your feelings by first owning them.
- b. KISS – keep it short and simple.
- c. Positive & negative communication
 - Complaint
 - Criticism
 - Contempt
 - Withdrawal

6. Conflict Resolution

- a. Handle differences as they occur.
- b. How did your families resolve conflict? WHERE WE COME FROM, Perspectives, pp. 17 & 19.
- c. Myth: “If you really loved me, you would have known.”
- d. Art of arguing
 - Keep calm.
 - Speak non-defensively.
 - Try validating spouse.
 - Attack the issue not the person.
 - How to resolve conflict satisfactory
 - The first one who realizes the argument has moved to a fight must stop the fight and re-establish “loving” communication.
 - “attitude check – I still love you.”

7. Homework Assignment Recommendations

- a. FIGHTING FAIR – Perspectives, p. 9
- b. FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING – Perspectives, p. 10
- c. ON OUR WORST BEHAVIOR – Perspectives, p. 11-13
- d. TRY, TRY AGAIN – Perspectives, p. 12-14

8. Q & A's

Ask couple if they have questions.

9. Closing Prayer

Session 3

Decision Making & Problem Solving

Perspectives Leaders' Guide p. 55

Leaders' Toolbox online:

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/index.cfm>

1. Opening Prayer
2. Begin by asking about their FOCCUS and homework.
 - a. Did they learn anything new about each other through doing and discussing the assignments?
3. Decision Process
 - a. Present the decision making process as outlined on Manual
 - b. We all have needs, couple should share theirs with each other
 - c. Important not to confuse wants (nice to have) with needs (must have)
 - d. Decisions are no longer "me" but rather "we"
 - e. Both must input their ideas as to acceptability of options
 - f. This is not only a right, but is a responsibility to the well being of the marriage
 - g. Pray before you start looking at options--not after the commitment to the decision is made
 - Ask each 'other'--"what do you think we decided?"
 - h. Important to reflect on "the bottom line of any decision has to be: "What is best for us as a couple/family?" "
 - i. Areas of decision making (Manual, p. 27)
 - Most likely not all will be needed with any one couple.
 - Do not feel limited to these areas if this couple needs more.
 - Remember-these areas are for discussion. You cannot make decisions for them.
 - j. SOLOMON # 9 and/or # 11 -- as appropriate
4. Finances – <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/financial-concerns.cfm>
 - a. How do you identify with money?
 - b. Does each understand the picture as to expected income and outgo?
 - c. Basic understanding--all "our" money, "our" bills
 - d. Budget that is realistic
 - e. Important that budget allows each to have a set sum that they do not have to account for every penny
 - f. Credit pitfalls---provide credit counseling service handout.
 - g. Need for insurance for belongings when renting
 - h. Need for wills to establish children's guardianship
 - i. Need to understand the long-term money goals of each other

- j. Christian perspective
 - k. Tithing, poverty issues, simplicity of lifestyle
 - l. Appropriate exercises:
 - THE DOLLAR ALMIGHTY. Perspectives, p. 53
 - YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE, Perspectives, p. 54
5. Explosive Issues
- a. Career opportunities--when each has his/her own career
 - Set parameters regarding acceptable conditions for me to consider whether to give up my career or relocate to further yours.
 - Career and children
 - “Day care” vs. “Home care”? - Which parent stays home?
 - b. Role expectations
 - Who expects who to accomplish which tasks of the daily routine?
 - Exercise - TAKE THIS JOB, Perspectives, p. 45-47
 - Chores are not gender-based any more.
 - Women who are "stay at home" do 86% of household tasks.
 - Women who work outside the home do 75% of household tasks.
 - Share the tasks; don't divide (assign) them.
 - Adjustments when children arrive
 - c. Role of in-laws
 - Exercise-- MY FAMILY, YOUR FAMILY, OUR FAMILY, Perspectives, pp. 18-20
 - Your marriage is to be the primary relationship.
 - The ‘blood relative’ should work through controversy with his/her family.
 - On the lighter side--what are you going to call your in-laws?
 - d. Domestic abuse
 - Since this is a growing problem area, review the information in the Online Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/conflict/violence.cfm>
 - If you have doubts, complete Perspectives exercise on your own and get help through appropriate agencies listed in couple packet.
 - For more information refer to Perspectives, p. 78
6. Homework Assignment
7. Q & A's
8. Closing Prayer

Session 4

Marital Intimacy

See *Perspectives Leader Guide*, pp. 54-55

See Leader Toolbox online

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/index.cfm>

1. Family, the school of love. See Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/family.cfm>
2. Theology of the Body/Sexuality Leaders' Toolbox <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/marriage-sexuality.cfm>
 - a. Married partners give the gift of themselves in sexual relations
 - b. Marital sex is also a spiritual communion.
 - c. My sexuality is that part of my personality that is the way it is partly because of my gender (basic differences and environment)
 - d. Sharing of our experiences that highlight differences
 - e. Harvard study about 25,000 words for women/12,500 for men
 - f. Wife comes to husband with a problem --she does not want a solution. She wants to vent; he wants to try to fix.
 - g. "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus": Does this describe you?
 - h. Our gender identity (whether innate or learned) does have an effect on our approach to sex.
 - i. The door for sexual satisfaction for men basically physical-touch, sight, smell, etc.
 - j. For women basically emotional-tenderness, sensitivity, communication, romance
3. Sexual Relationship
 - a. Need to develop a comfortable way to communicate sexual needs to one another
 - b. SOLOMON # 12, Perspectives Workbook, p. 34
 - c. Not every sign of physical need may indicate a need to have intercourse
 - Sometimes all I need is a hug
 - Importance of sharing our sexual expectations of marriage
 - Sex and sexuality exercise from Perspectives, p. 65-67
 - This is for private discussion; not to be discussed with the group.
 - d. Make an effort to create a 'comfortable atmosphere' as we show our love
 - e. Review SOLOMON #3
 - f. Past experiences
 - Avoid comparing spouse with past relationships.
 - Certain issues must be shared between the partners:
 - Children from past relationships
 - STD history
 - Negative experiences that might cause future problems
 - g. Remember the basic reason for physical experience is to show love
4. Intimacy
 - a. Build intimacy on many levels
 - b. Exercise on INTIMACY CHECK UP, Perspectives, p. 26-28

- c. Exercise on TOWARD INTIMACY, Perspectives, p.25-27
5. Family Planning
 - a. Share video presentation or give a witness talk about NFP
 - b. Present what the church teachings are on the matter
 - c. Planning your family is not wrong according to the church
 - d. Only problem is when artificial means are employed
 - e. The church not only approves of, but also encourages, NFP
 - f. Provide the NFP resources in the couple packet with teacher contact information
 - g. Infertility
 - Infertile couples can be open to life in other ways:
 - adoption, working with children, foster parenting, etc.
 6. Homework Assignments
 7. Q & A's
 8. Closing Prayer

Session 5

Spirituality & Children

See Perspectives Leader Guide, pp. 57-57

See Leader Toolbox Online

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/index.cfm>

<http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/index.cfm>

1. Opening Prayer
2. Review the objectives of this session
 - a. Making God an active partner in the relationship
 - b. Forming a Christian household connected to Parish
 - c. Scriptural basis for husbands and wives
 - d. Interfaith marriage (if appropriate)
3. Church (Sacrament)
 - a. SOLOMON # 1, Perspectives, p. 33
 - b. Sacramentality of marriage, Leader's Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/sacrament.cfm>
 - c. Outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace
 - d. The marriage 'grace' is what assures us of our love when we might not like him/her
 - e. Find ways for "living the sacrament" - Perspectives p. 79
 - f. An unspoken statement about belief in God and the need to live in a relationship based on what Scripture and Catholic tradition teach.
 - g. "Braid" analogy (man-woman-God: "A three-ply cord is not easily broken" Eccl. 4:12)
4. Forming a Christian Home
 - a. Connected to a faith community. Joining a parish.
 - i. Provide contact information for connections to parish life.
 - ii. Information for joining a parish elsewhere.
 - b. The Domestic Church – your home is a true expression of church
 - c. Building traditions through the seasons and holidays
 - d. Your family inspires others to love and service
5. Married Spirituality, Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/married-spirituality.cfm>
 - a. What does my faith mean to me?
 - b. Learn to pray together regularly
 - c. Develop a joy of sharing and being with one another
 - d. Forgive one another
 - e. Take time to rest and reflect alone and renew your spirit
6. Interfaith Weddings/Families (if applicable), Leaders' Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/interfaith-weddings.cfm>

Half of all marriages in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are interfaith

 - a. Handle children' faith decisions very carefully
 - b. Build spiritual common ground while respecting differences

- c. TWO FAITHS, ONE LOVE, Perspectives, p. 39
7. Sacred Signs, Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/church/sacred-signs.cfm>
 - a. Importance of marriage vows
 - b. Do you both have the same understanding as to what the words mean?
 - c. Importance of strong spiritual life to a marriage
 - d. The family that prays together stays together. Leader Toolbox, <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/commitment/stats-risk.cfm>
 - Approx. 1 in every 2 US marriages ends in divorce
 - 1 in 50 marriages of couples married in a church ends in divorce
 - 1 in 1105 marriages of couples, married in a church and who have a prayer life at home, end in divorce
 - e. Psalm 127:1: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”
 8. Parenting <http://www.archbalt.org/marriage-family/engaged/toolbox/children/parenting-tips.cfm>
 - a. Scripture makes it clear that our first responsibility as parents love our children. Discipline a part of love.
 - b. We are charged that they are brought up to love God, with an understanding of God expects from his people.
 - c. See Colossians 3:20-21—“You children, obey your parents in everything as this is the acceptable way in the Lord; and fathers, do not nag your children lest they lose heart.”
 - d. Basic parental guidelines:
 - Who is in charge?
 - Children interpret the existence of boundaries as "love".
 - However, they are always testing the boundaries.
 - Parents decide when the boundaries are moved (rules are changed).
 - With older children, it may be appropriate to include them in the discussion -- but the decision belongs to the parents.
 - e. Agreed upon disciplines must:
 - Be appropriate to the infraction
 - Not be the same for all children --each is individual person
 - Be administered with consistency and mercy
 - f. Parents are accountable to God for modeling moral life.
 - Children will follow example not words.
 - Children spell love "t-i-m-e".
 9. Q & A's
 10. Couple completes PROGRAM EVALUATION.
 11. CERTIFICATE
 12. Closing Prayer

Following last session, Leaders:

Mail Evaluations to Marriage Preparation office. Keep the couple in your prayers.