

Sacrament of Marriage Intergenerational Program "Celebrating Marriage"

Learning Objectives

This session guides learners of all ages to . . .

- develop a deeper understanding of the theology, symbols, and rituals of the Sacrament of Matrimony (know-what).
- recognize the importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the married life, and the model of unconditional love that spouses are called to live, not just for their sakes, but for all (know-why).
- live more consciously and actively the call of covenant love with one's spouse, relations, within the community, and in the world (know-how).

Catechism Connection

1601-1666

Potential Uses

- Preparation program for the Celebration of Matrimony, World Marriage Sunday, Holy Family Sunday, Parish Wedding Anniversary celebrations, and Sunday Lectionary readings (Wedding Feast at Cana).

Background Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Washington, DC: USCC Publishing, 1997.

Rite of Marriage. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship. 1971.

Familiaris Consortio (Papal Exhortation On the Family). Pope John Paul II, 1981

Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops to Families, USCCB, 1993.

Finley, Kathleen. *The Seeker's Guide to Building a Christian Marriage: 11 Essential Skills*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000.

Gaillardetz, Richard R. *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002.

Kehrwald, Leif. *Marriage and the Spirituality of Intimacy*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996.

Lawler, Michael G. *Secular Marriage: Christian Sacrament*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985.

Richstatter, Thomas. *Sacraments – How Catholics Pray*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995.

Roberts, William P. *Marriage: Sacrament of Hope and Challenge*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1988

Urbine, William and William Seifert. *On Life and Love: A Guide to Catholic Teaching on Marriage and Family*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996.

Session Resources

Before the Session

Environment

The session will begin in the church with a “Marriage Ceremony.” It won’t be a wedding, but it should have some appearances of a wedding. Decorate the church as if it were a wedding or a celebration of marriage renewal: flowers, banners, ribbon, candles, etc.

Home Kit

People of Faith – Generations Learning Together Magazines (Harcourt Religion)

- *Celebrating the Sacraments: Marriage* (Volume 4, number 5)

Catholic Update (St. Anthony Messenger Press)

- Richstatter, Thomas. *Sacrament of Marriage: Sign of Faithful Love*. Catholic Update C0596

Prayer Resource

For additional prayer services consult:

Haas, David. *Increase Our Faith – Parish Prayer Services for Whole Community Catechesis*. (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C) Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004, 2005, 2006.

Materials for the Session

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Pieces of poster board
- Paper and pens
- Markers, crayons, pencils
- Colored paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Magazines

- Other art supplies
- Colored card stock
- Ribbons, yarn

Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service

Session at a Glance

Part One: Gathering (5 minutes)

Part Two: All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)

Experiencing the Rite of Marriage

Part Three: In-Depth Learning Experience (75-90 minutes)

Choose a Learning Group Format

- Whole Group Format
- or
- Age Group Format

Learning Plan

1. Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage (Reflection on All Ages Learning Experience)
2. Promoting Married Life in Today's Society
3. Marriage A Sacrament of Service
 - a) Marriage and Family Living (Families with Children)
 - b) Marriage Panel Discussion (Adolescents, Young Adults, Adults)
 - c) Marriage Vows (Adolescents, Young Adults, Adults)

Part Four: Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application (20 minutes)

Part Five. Closing Prayer Service (10 minutes)

Part 1

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Ask people to make a nametag.
- Distribute the Home Kit for the session, including any handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session.

2. Group Formation

In the Whole Group Format, organize people into intergenerational small groups of approximately eight people OR organize table groups of families with children, adolescents, and adults. If you organize into intergenerational groups, participants will remain with their group for the entire program. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational – children, teens, parents, and grandparents – keep them together in one group.

3. Opening Prayer Service

The Opening Prayer Service for this program on marriage is incorporated into the All Ages Learning Experience.

Part 2

All-Ages Learning Experience (25 minutes)

Preparation

Ask one couple (or two or three) to be the focal point of the marriage ceremony. They will participate in the opening procession and exchange/renewal of vows. You may also want to involve some children in the opening procession and other parts of the ceremony.

Recruit a lector to proclaim the reading.

Celebration of the Rite of Marriage

Welcome all participants (couples, families, children, adults, all) and provide an overview of the program. [spoken text] Use your own words to communicate the following points:

We begin by gathering in the church in order to witness and participate in a "marriage ceremony." While it's not a wedding, we will use prayers and rituals directly from the official Rite of Marriage. All married couples, even those whose spouses are not with us today, are encouraged to join in the ritual at the appropriate times to reaffirm their covenant love through marriage.

To begin, any couple who wishes is welcome to join N. and N. (designated couple) at the back of the church for the marriage procession. If you'd like to be part of the procession, go to the back of the church now.

Procession

The priest or celebrant meets the couples at the church door or before the altar, and addresses them with words suited to the occasion and of Christian joy. The celebrant also welcomes the entire community, and invites them to introduce themselves to those around them.

Using appropriate music, couples lead the procession to the altar.

Introductory Rite

Celebrant:

Father,

You have made the bond of marriage

a holy mystery,

a symbol of Christ's love for his Church.

Hear our prayers for N. and N., and all couples present here today.

With faith in you and in each other

they pledge their love today,

May their lives always bear witness

to the reality of that love.

*We ask this
through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Liturgy of the Word

A reading from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Cor 13:4-7)

Homily (brief, optional)

Rite of Marriage

Celebrant:

My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.

N. and N. have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

Consent

Celebrant:

I, N. take you, N., to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

I, N. take you, N., to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings.

What God has joined, men must not divide.

All. Amen

Blessing and Exchange of the Rings

Celebrant:

May the Lord bless + these rings which you give to each other as the sign of your love and fidelity.

R. Amen.

N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Part 3

In-Depth Learning Experiences (90-100 minutes)

Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences.

You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of catechists who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leader catechists to have one catechist work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for This Format

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, catechists and small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Whole Group Format Outline

You can use a *Whole Group Format* guiding groups through each of the symbol/ritual activities at the same time. Organize people into table groups. Groups can be intergenerational or organized by age groups, e.g., families with children, young adolescents, older adolescents, young adults, and adults. The lead facilitator guides the entire group through the lesson plan. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group. The age-appropriate learning activities for each symbol/ritual are conducted in table groups. Where needed, catechists/small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Learning Plan

1. Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage (Reflection on All Ages Learning Experience)
2. Promoting Married Life in Today's Society
3. Marriage A Sacrament of Service

Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic.

You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators and catechists to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all of the families through each learning experience, while catechist move from table to table assisting.

Age Group Format Outline

The In-Depth Learning Plan can be utilized for break-out groups of families with children, adolescents, and adults.

Families with Children

Learning Plan

1. Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage
2. Promoting Married Life in Today's Society
3. Marriage: A Sacrament of Service
4. Marriage and Family Living

Adolescent, Young Adult, and Adult

Learning Plan

1. Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage
2. Marriage Vows
3. Marriage Panel
4. Promoting Married Life in Today's Society

1. Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage

Whole Group: All Ages

Age Group: All Ages

Preparation

Create a power point of flip chart overview of the ritual moments in marriage that were witnessed to in the all ages learning experience:

1. Procession or Welcome at Church Entrance
2. Opening Prayer
3. Liturgy of the Word
4. Exchange of Consent
5. Blessing and Exchange of the Rings

Paper and pens for each group.

Introduction to the Sacrament of Marriage

1. Invite participants to remember as a group the moments of the sacrament of marriage that were prayed together in the all ages learning experience. Children may be invited to draw pictures to represent what they saw to share with the group. Invite the participants to add any other aspects of the sacrament of marriage that were not celebrated in the all ages learning but that they believe are part of the rite.
2. Once the groups have completed their list, compare their list to the list you have created in the preparation above. Add other aspects as needed onto the master list then invite each group to engage in a discussion about their listed moments, using the following question to guide them:
 - a. What do you think the things you have listed each mean? For example, why does the priest welcome the couple at the door or why is there a procession? What is the couple really saying to each other when they consent to marry one another?
3. [spoken text] Using the master list as a guide, share a brief overview of the sacrament of marriage with the participants using the following text to assist you:

A. Entrance Procession and Welcome

The rite of marriage begins with the priest or presider welcoming the couple. This welcome either happens at the entrance of the church as the couple and their witnesses/attendants process in or it happens before the altar if the bride and groom choose to enter separately or to walk down the aisle with their parents.

In the rite of marriage the couple says yes to their desire to being married in the church in the presence of community and we as community welcome and support them in their decision.

B. Opening Prayer

The priest or presider prays the gathering prayer and puts into God's hands the needs of the couple being married and the needs of couples everywhere.

Through the gathering prayer the couple and the community gathered say AMEN to God being the heart and support of married love.

C. Liturgy of the Word

The Word of God is shared with the community. The readings for the rite of marriage celebrate faithful love, commitment, and challenge all present to love others as God and Jesus love them.

Through the Liturgy of the Word we say yes to loving others as God has loved us, especially through the gift of his son Jesus. We say yes to listening to the Good News and say yes to living the Good News in our world. We say yes to God's love as expressed through his word, enabling us to love to the best of our abilities.

D. Consent

During the consent, the priest or presider asks the couple if they have freely chosen to give themselves to one another in the sacrament of marriage.

The priest or presider says to the couple:

Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

The couple then shares their vows with one another.

Through the act of consent and the exchange of vows, the couple says yes to freely choosing to be married and tells the Christian community that they as family will be faithful members of the community. The community witnessing the marriage in turn is saying yes to being a good community to be a member of, a community that cares for one another and helps people to live out their Christian commitments.

E. Blessing of the Rings

In the blessing of the rings, the presider actually blesses the couple not the rings. The rings witness to the couple, the community and to the world that the couple is living in a relationship committed to each other through the practice and value of faithful loving.

Through the placing of the rings on each other's hands the couple says yes to a lifelong commitment to each other with the support of the Christian community. Just as God's love for God's people has no beginning or end so to the ring proclaims a couple's commitment to long term loving.

F. General Intercessions

The prayers of the faithful in the marriage rite remind us that we stand before God with the needs of others and that married life is not just about selfish love between a couple but love that serves and welcomes others.

Through the general intercessions the couple and the community renew their commitment to being a people of service to the kingdom of God, a people who are called to pray for and journey with all those in need.

G. Nuptial Blessing

The nuptial blessing says:

“Father, keep them always true to your commandments.

Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life. Give them strength from the gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others.

Bless them with children and help them to be good parents.

May they live to see their children’s children.

And after a happy old age, grant them fullness of life with the saints in the kingdom of heaven.”

Through the nuptial blessing the couple commits once again to faithfulness, to being witnesses of their faith to the world and through that witness lead others to fullness of life in Christ.

4. Close this learning activity by inviting the participants to share with each other what has the most meaning for them in the rite of marriage, or simply what part they like best.

2. Promoting Married Life in Today's Society

Whole Group: All Ages

Age Group: All Ages

Preparation

Gather the supplies you will need for this activity:

- Pieces of poster board
- Markers, crayons, pencils
- Colored paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Magazines
- Other art supplies

Promoting Married Life in Today's Society

1. [spoken text] In these words or your own, say the following to the group:

Marriage is a vocational choice. It is a covenant of love that binds husband and wife together for the whole of life, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health.

All couples will tell you that they cannot live the married life without support and encouragement from others – family, friends, neighbors, church community, and so on. The married life is not lived in isolation.

Even though most North Americans are married or will marry at some point in their lives, our popular culture does not always support covenant love and lifelong commitment. Many aspects of our fast-paced, instant gratification, media influenced society favor short-term, shallow relationships over long-term relationships reflected in the true meaning of marriage.

With these thoughts in mind, and remembering what we just learnt about marriage through our tour of the rite, let's embark on an exercise to influence popular culture – at least among ourselves – in the opposite direction. In what creative ways can we exercise a voice in favor of lifelong, committed relationship?

2. Explain that this activity requires everyone's creative imagination. Explain that through working in small groups each person will be asked to contribute their ideas toward developing a positive public relations campaign in support of marriage. At the core of this campaign are three important components:
 - A slogan or tag line
 - An image or logo
 - A jingle (simple song)

Invite participants to imagine that once these components are created, they will then be used to promote the married life in our popular culture through typical media outlets: radio and TV spots, billboards, bumper stickers, etc.

3. Begin working. Use the supplies provided. [spoken text] Say to the groups,

As you work on your jingle, image, or slogan, make sure that you do not put down other legitimate vocational choices, e.g. single life, in order to lift up marriage. Present the positive side of marriage on its own accord.

4. Gather the results in the large group. Invite one or two persons from each small group to offer any necessary explanation about their slogan, logo, or jingle that might provide insights as to how the group made their decision.
5. Thank everyone for their participation and creativity.

3. Marriage A Sacrament of Service

Whole Group: All Ages

Age Group: Families with Children

Preparation

Gather the supplies you will need for this activity:

- Paper and pencil – one for each family
- Colored card stock
- Markers, crayons, ribbons, yarn, glue sticks, scissors
- Other art supplies for making cards

Marriage a Sacrament of Service

1. [spoken text] In your own words or these, say the following:
When a man and a woman celebrate Matrimony, they promise to love and serve God, each other, any children they may have, and the Church community. This is a promise for life!
2. Ask each participant or family group to bring to mind a married couple whom they all know and admire. Tell them that this activity works best if they choose a couple other than Mom and Dad of the family. Ask them to make note of the following characteristics of this couple:
 - a. Couple's name:
 - b. How long have they been married?
 - c. When is their anniversary?
 - d. Do they have children? If so, what are their names and ages?
 - e. Grandchildren? If so, what are their names and ages?
3. Invite each group to have a discussion about the couple(s) they chose using the following questions
 - a. Why do you admire this couple?
 - b. In what ways do you see that they love and serve God?
 - c. In what ways do you see that they love and serve each other?
 - d. In what ways do you see that they love and serve their children and grandchildren?
 - e. In what ways do you see that they love and serve others?
 - f. What is one important thing about marriage that this couple has taught you?
4. Activity: ask each family to design a card about love, and give it to this couple on their next anniversary, or on Valentine's Day, or the next time they see them.
5. Re-gather as a large group. Invite a few family members to share with the whole group any insight or new learning that they discussed about marriage.
6. Thank everyone for participating, and remind them to give their card to their couple.

Marriage and Family Living

Age Group: Families with Children

Preparation

Gather the supplies you will need for this activity:

- Bible
- Handout: *Three Key Faith Activities*
- Handout: *Tips and Guidelines for Family Ritual*
- Handout: *St. Isidore and St. Maria*

Marriage and Family Living

1. Marriage is based on friendship. Ask the participants: ***What do you consider to be the two most important qualities in a good friend?*** Invite them to share with each other in their groups.
2. [spoken text] Say to the group: *In the New Testament, marriage is an image of Christ's relationship, Christ's friendship, with the Church. This means that just as Christ loves the Church, so should married couples love each other. Their love should be a model of Christ's love for us.*
3. Ask someone to read aloud John 2:1-11. [spoken text] Discuss the meaning of this story by pointing out the following in your own words or in the text provided:

Jesus' presence at Cana showed his appreciation for marriage, and that marriage is from God. Because of Jesus' teaching, the Church recognizes marriage as a sacrament. It is a lifelong partnership of service to help people grow together in love, and it is the proper place to raise children in the faith. . Just as marriage is holy and sacred, so too is family life . . . even if the household does not have a married couple.

4. [spoken text] Share the following in your own words or in the words below.

Most of the church's saints are single people or priests or religious brothers and sisters. One married couple that became saints is St. Isidore and St. Maria. I would like to share their story with you.

Use the handout *St. Isidore and St. Maria* to share their story with the participants. Or, invite two people to dress up as St. Isidore and St. Maria and share their story in person.

5. [spoken text] In these, or your own words, say to the group:

Just like St. Isidore and St. Maria, your family and home is a key spiritual center for you and your children. In their 1994 Pastoral Message to Families called "Follow the Way of Love", the US Bishops make a very profound statement: "As Christian families you not only belong to the church, but your daily life is a true expression of church."

Imagine that ... your daily life is a true expression of sacredness! So the good news is not that yours can be a holy and sacred family. The good news is . . . you already are!

6. Family faith requires intentional response. [spoken text] Use these or your own words to say the following:

Belief in God is not a passive enterprise. It is active and intentional. Like a piano player who practices music, or the dancer who practices dance, Christians are called to practice their faith. How? For families, there are three key activities that help to insure that our faith becomes a part of our daily living:

- a. Family faith conversation: simply talking about our beliefs, our relationship with God, even our questions and doubts*
 - b. Family ritual and devotion: taking time to pray and do ritual as a family – daily, seasonally, and during moments of significant change*
 - c. Family outreach and service: performing works of mercy and works of justice for others*
7. Invite participants in their family groups to discuss the three key activities. Ask them which of the three challenges them the most. Give them a copy of handout: “Three Key Faith Activities.” Ask them to read through the ideas on the handout and choose at least one specific family faith activity that they will incorporate into their daily family living.
 8. Invite those who wish to describe the family faith activity they intend to incorporate into their daily lives.

Marriage Panel Discussion

Age Group: Adolescents, Young Adults, and Adults

Preparation

Find eight couples willing to sit on a panel to share their story with the participants. Get couples who are at various stages of the married life, e.g. engaged, newly married, married many years, remarried, married with children, married without children. Invite them to prepare themselves to be part of the panel by reflecting on the questions found on the handout *Faith Sharing Questions on Marriage*

Gather the supplies you will need for this activity:

- One index card and one pencil for each participant

Marriage Panel Discussion

1. Begin the session by asking each couple on the panel to introduce themselves by sharing who they are, how long they've been married, and, in their opinion, one key to living the married life well.
2. After the introductions, provide an index card and pencil to each participant. Ask them to take a moment to jot down one question they would like to ask about marriage. Ask them to indicate on the card whether they are a teen, or an adult.
3. Divide the large group into eight small groups. Ask one married couple from the panel to go with each small group. Give each small group small stack of cards – some cards from each group: teens, adults.
4. Ask the married couples to conduct a discussion about married life by responding to the questions on the cards. They can also invite further questions and discussion from the group. Focus on teen's questions first. Try to engage the teens in further conversation.
5. Re-gather as a large group. Invite participants to share anything significant that was said in their small group.
6. Conclude by thanking the married couples for sharing their marriages and facilitating the small group discussion.

The Marriage Vows

Age Group: Adolescents, Young Adults, and Adults

Preparation

Gather paper and pencils for each participant and copies of the handouts *Characteristics of Christian Marriage* and *“Cohabitation: Did You Know?”*

The Marriage Vows

1. [spoken text] In these or your own words, say to the group:

The Rite of Marriage offers much flexibility in a wedding ceremony: prayers, readings, music, and so on. Since it is the only sacrament in which the ones who receive it also confer it – it’s not the priest who confers matrimony on the couple, rather, the couple confers the sacrament on each other – it’s important they learn about the Rite and become familiar with their options. By doing so, they will learn a lot about marriage, and how the church views marriage.

One point they will learn is that expressing ‘consent’ is paramount. Many items in a wedding ceremony are flexible and optional, but the free expression of consent is not. “One thing only must remain intact, namely, that the priest ask and receive the consent of the contracting parties.”

2. Ask the group what they think “free expression of consent” means. By contrast, ask them to share examples of consent that is not free.
3. Ask the group if anyone, or working together as a group, can recite by memory the typical marriage vows that couples exchange at a wedding. Use newsprint or a whiteboard to write what they come up with. Ask them where they learned these phrases. (Likely, from TV and other media.)
4. [spoken text] Explain to the group, in your own words, that in Matrimony, the exchange of vows has two parts:

- a) **Declare Intentions.** The celebrant asks a series of questions and each spouse responds affirmatively:

And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.

N. and N. have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

Explain that this exchange is somewhat passive. The celebrant asks the questions and each spouse simply gives a one word answer.

- b) **Consent.** The couple is then asked to go beyond answering a few simple questions. They must actively give their consent to each other, with the celebrant and community as witness:

I, N. take you, N., to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

I, N. take you, N., to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

By contrast, this part is more active. Each spouse must declare his or her consent and desire to be wedded. Marriage is much more than a simple “I do.”

5. Writing Marriage Vows: No matter what age, each of us should reflect on the meaning of declaring consent in marriage. [spoken text] Use these or your own words to say the following:
- Even though you are likely not engage to be married, how would you write your marriage vows to fully declare your consent, lasting, unconditional love to your beloved? Use these characteristics of Christian marriage as guideposts for writing your text:
- *Marriage is a lifelong commitment.*
 - *Marriage is more than a contract. It's a covenant.*
 - *The love of spouses ideally reflects God's unconditional love for all creation, and Christ's love for the Church.*
 - *Marriage is more than a private agreement between two persons. In addition to the promise made between spouses, there are two other promises made at every wedding: 1) the couple promises to the community to be a living witness and model of covenant love, and 2) the community promises to support and hold accountable the couple in journey of life and love.*
6. Provide copies of the handout: “Characteristics of Christian Marriage.” Invite participants to take 10 – 15 minutes to write their own marriage vows. Invite volunteers to share what they have written either in small groups, or with the whole group.
7. Facilitate a conversation about cohabitation. As most teens and adults know, living together prior to marriage is a common practice in North America. Use the handout “*Cohabitation: Did You Know?*” to conduct a discussion about the practice of couples living together before marriage. Allow everyone to express their opinion, but at some point you will certainly need to voice the church’s teaching that sexual activity is appropriate only in marriage. Guide the conversation in such a way to point out that, for some, living together may actually hinder their “free expression of consent” in marriage. How? Some feel pressured to marry because it seems like the “next logical step.” Other circumstances – children, pets, finances, etc. – may also impede an individual’s freedom of choice to marry. (For more information on cohabitation, read *Marriage Preparation and Cohabiting Couples*, Committee on Marriage and Family, USCCB, 1999.)
8. Conclude by thanking those who shared, and offering your concluding thoughts on the importance of “free expression of consent” in marriage.

Part 4

Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application (20 minutes)

Advanced Preparation

- Determine what each group will bring back to the large group or to their small group to share as a result of their learning.
- Determine how each group will share their reports or projects so that they “teach” the other groups about the event and theme.

Home Kit

Develop a Sacrament of Marriage Home Kit that *extends* and *expands* the learning that has taken place through the intergenerational learning program. It should *engage* families and individuals in living their faith at home through traditions and celebrations, rituals, symbols, prayers, service projects, learning activities, and enrichment activities. Include specific activities on the event that you have selected as a focus for the session. These additional activities can include learning activities about the event, Scripture readings, table rituals, prayers, and so on.

Use a variety of design formats for your activities, such as a prayer card, stand-up card, poster, placemat, newsletter, booklet, magnet, bookmark, and artwork.

1. Whole Group Sharing and Reflection

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group or with small groups. Ask the participants to share what they learned in a small group setting or by inviting participants or groups, representing families, teens, and adults, to share projects or reflections with the entire. Here are examples of presentations that the different learning groups can share with the larger group:

- The families with children group could “show and tell” some of the anniversary cards they made for married couples.
- The adolescents could share some of their “promoting marriage” material that they created (jingle, logo, or tag line).
- The adults and young adults could share a couple of samples of re-written marriage vows.

[spoken text] Second, present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to learn about the Sacrament of Marriage through symbols, prayers, and activities. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned in this session:

- What is one thing you learned about the Sacrament of Marriage that you did not know before?
- What will you look for when you participate in the celebration of the Sacrament?
- Why do you think this sacrament is so important for us as Catholics?

Review the Home Kit for the event containing prayers, rituals, service projects, family enrichment, and learning activities. Guide everyone in developing an individual or family action plan for living at home using the Home Kit, and planning for participation in the sacrament.

2. Reflection—Application Strategies

Prepare strategies and activities to guide individuals and families in *reflecting* on the meaning of their learning and their participation in the Church event and in *applying* their learning to daily living as a Catholic. The goal is to help people apply the beliefs and practices to their daily life, and report or “publish” their learning with others in the parish community.

Reflection and application activities and strategies can be included with the Home Kit. You can also include a time for feedback in your next intergenerational learning program

There are a variety of formats for reflection—application activities. Reflection tools include unfinished sentences, reflection questions, learning journals, and a structured reflection activities. Application tools include action plans, practice plans, “to do” lists, and resolutions.

Art and media strategies can also be used to express reflection and application. Consider activities such as a bumper stickers, picture collages, “recipe for living” cards, posters, photos, and projects that create and bring back to Sunday Mass or the next intergenerational learning program.

Example: Reflection on Participating in the Sacrament of Marriage

What did you see at the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage?

- Think of the symbols and gestures you saw at the celebration. What did the symbols and gestures mean to you as you experienced the celebration of Marriage?

What did you hear at the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage?

- Think of the songs you sang. Was there a particular song that connected with the celebration of Marriage? What was its message?
- Think of the Scripture readings in the celebration of Marriage. What was their message? What is God and the Church saying to you and the community about the Sacrament of Marriage?
- Think of the homily? What was the message?

How did the community pray at the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage?

- Think of the prayer texts in the celebration of Marriage. What and who are we praying for? What are the prayer texts teaching us about the Sacrament of Marriage?

Part 5

Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

Introduction

In these words or your own, say to the group:

Like the Opening Prayer, we will close by returning the Rite of Marriage itself with prayers of intention for our married couples, the Nuptial Blessing, and the Lord's Prayer.

Opening Prayer

Celebrant:

*My dear friends, let us turn to the Lord and pray
that he will bless with his grace N.
now married in Christ to N.
and that he will unite in love the couple
he has joined in this holy bond.*

Please respond: Lord hear our prayer.

*For N. and N. that their love for each other may continue to grow in the peace of Christ,
we pray to the Lord . . .*

*For the parents of N. and N. that they may be an example of love to their children,
we pray to the Lord . . .*

*For all married couples here today, that witnessing N. and N. making their commitment of love,
they renew their love for one another,
we pray to the Lord . . .*

*For all that are gathered here today to celebrate with N. and N., especially those who have
traveled a great distance, that God will bless them and watch over them,
we pray to the Lord . . .*

*For the deceased relatives and friends of N. and N., that God may shower them with eternal love,
we pray to the Lord . . .*

Nuptial Blessing

Celebrant:

*Father, by your power you have made everything out of nothing.
In the beginning you created the universe and made mankind in your own likeness.
You gave man the constant help of woman
so that man and woman should no longer be two, but one flesh,
and you teach us that what you have united may never be divided.*

*Father, you have made the union of man and wife so holy a mystery
that it symbolizes the marriage of Christ and his Church.*

Father, by your plan man and woman are united,

*and married life has been established
as the one blessing that was not forfeited by original sin
or washed away in the flood.*

*Look with love upon this woman, your daughter,
now joined to her husband in marriage.
She asks your blessing. Give her the grace of love and peace.
May she always follow the example of the holy women
whose praises are sung in the scriptures.*

*May her husband put his trust in her and recognize that she is his equal
and the heir with him to the life of grace.
May he always honor her and love her as Christ loves his bride, the Church.*

*Father, keep them always true to your commandments.
Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life.*

*Give them the strength which comes from the gospel
so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others.
(Bless them with children and help them to be good parents.
May they live to see their children's children.)
And, after a happy old age, grant them fullness of life with the saints
in the kingdom of heaven.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Celebrant: Now let us stand and pray together in the words our Lord has given us:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.*

Blessing

*Celebrant:
May almighty God, the Father, and the Son + and the Holy Spirit, bless you and remain with you
forever.*

All: Amen.