



SHARING FAITH IN THE
DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER

HOLY FAMILIES

THE JOY OF LOVE, AN EXPLORATION OF AMORIS LAETITIA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HOLY FAMILIES: An exploration of Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love

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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE



FORWARD

Each year in Westminster Cathedral, up to seven hundred married couples gather on the eve of Pentecost Sunday. They come together to celebrate their love and to renew their commitment to one another at a Mass in Thanksgiving for Matrimony. These couples, from parishes across the Diocese of Westminster, are celebrating special anniversaries, milestone moments in their

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marriages – one, ten, twenty-five, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, even seventy-five years together. The accumulated wisdom and experience of those couples is beyond words and the fruits of those marriages beyond number. It is always a beautiful occasion, at once personal, poignant and powerful.

The fact that it takes place in the Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Diocese, at a Mass celebrated by the Cardinal, is a proclamation of the supreme dignity, value and importance of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, not just in the lives of those present (including their proud and grateful families) but for the whole world. As the theme for the World Meeting of Families in Ireland in August 2018 puts it, The Gospel of the Family means Joy for the World.

This new faith-sharing resource for small communities is a proclamation of this same truth. Exploring themes from the Holy Father's teaching in *Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Love, the 2016 Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, it seeks over six sessions to explore the beauty and blessing, the joys and challenges of marriage and family life. My hope is that you will see your own experience of family life acknowledged, reflected on and affirmed here, and that you will glimpse again the sheer power of love.

I am deeply grateful to our three contributors: Pia Matthews writes as a wife, mother and theologian, and was a participant in the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in Rome. Bishop John Sherrington and Bishop John Wilson have both served as Parish Priests before their ordination as Bishops. All three have shared something of themselves in their reflections, their own life experience, and their profound commitment to human flourishing according to God's plan.

May the Lord bless and guide each of us in our vocation to love.

Fr Chris Vipers
Director of the Agency for Evangelisation



For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages - they will be of great benefit.

GATHERING as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another. Always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

HOSPITALITY and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes (see page 7 for the structure of the meeting). Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

PRAYER will take different forms; we will make a suggestion for a Psalm or another opening prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Ordinarily, it is good to have about 15 minutes of prayer. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. During the session, we need to reflect on our real experience. Then we listen to Scripture. Use a Bible or a Sunday Missal to read the gospel story of the week. Remember that there are variations in the different translations of the Bible. This is ok. Sometimes exploring the differences in the versions that your group use can enrich your reflections. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation.

RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.



? WHAT IS THE LEADER OF YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader. A leader is not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with the particular responsibility of facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of the session and creating a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process each week
- Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group
- Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep sharing moving
- Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak
- Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as an opportunity for sharing in which they might grow in faith



THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

(Timings are just rough indications. Please feel very free to adapt as necessary).

5. ACT

Our sharing would not be complete without deciding how to put our faith into practice. With a reflection from Pope Francis, you will be invited to respond to what you have heard in the session.

🕒 15 mins

1. GATHER

🕒 30 mins

At the first meeting, introduce yourselves to each other. Thereafter, following your opening prayer, you will have an opportunity to catch up with one another, and share how last week's session influenced you.

2. SEE

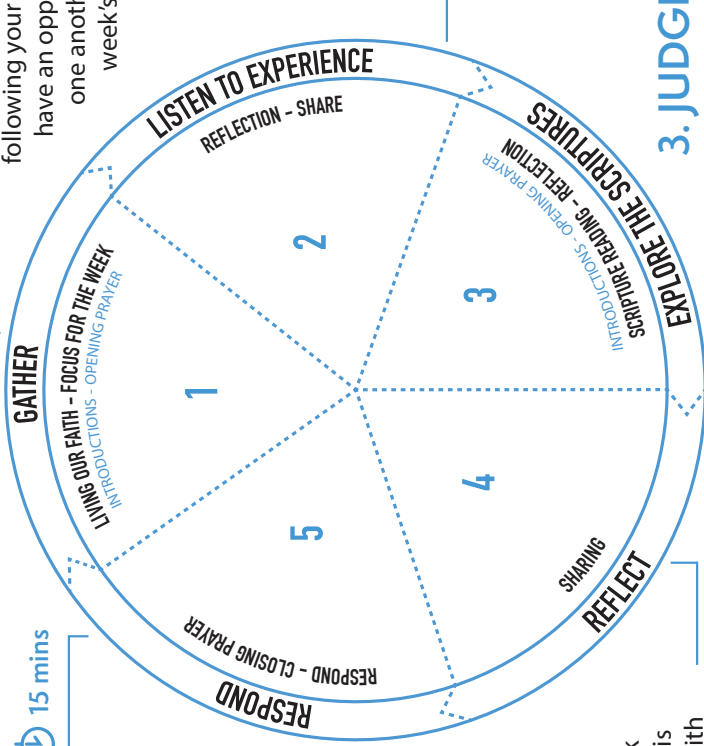
This part of the session is about 'your own story' and how it relates to the theme of the session. Having listened to a short reflection, you will be given the opportunity, with the help of questions, to share your own experience.

🕒 45 mins

This part is about exploring 'God's story' in scripture. Having listened to the Gospel for the week, you will be invited to reflect on what you have heard.

4. REFLECT

This is an opportunity to reflect on 'our story' - God's story and your own story - and how to link the two together. What is the meaning for you? With the help of a reflection and questions, you will have the opportunity to share.



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WEEK 1
THE JOURNEY...

BISHOP JOHN SHERRINGTON



1



i To prepare for this first session, take time to read 'Faith sharing in a small community' and 'Structure of the meeting' on pages 5-7.

GATHER



At this first session, begin by introducing yourselves to each other. Share your names and a little about yourself.

The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Father, we thank you for the blessings of our families and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to walk with Jesus, the Way, the Life and the Truth. May the love shown to us in the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth help us to forgive others, learn from one another, grow in wisdom and support families who are struggling and in need. With the assistance of Mary our Mother, we make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Bob and Margaret had a long marriage of just over 50 years. They had been at Mass every Sunday until Margaret became ill and then she used to receive Holy Communion at home. The eldest daughter, one of six, ran Bob to church each week but wouldn't go inside. Since her marriage had broken down, she had been most generous to them but said she now had her own spirituality. One son practiced his faith but none of his children were interested. From the families of the other children, it seemed that only two grandchildren still went to church.

At Margaret's funeral, Bob sat in the front row and noticed that only six members of the family of about forty people went to communion. He wondered, 'where did we go wrong?' He remembered joyfully taking the six children to Mass and sending them to Catholic schools. Two were still married, three had divorced and now lived with new partners.



All were good people. He could never fathom out Tom who lived away in London. He thought he might be gay but they had never discussed it.

Bob cried not only for Margaret but for his family which he didn't really understand any more. He remembered that when Tom was born and Margaret was very ill, the doctors said they shouldn't have any more children. They did turn down an operation, but prayed this pregnancy wouldn't happen. When it did, it had placed a huge strain on their intimacy.

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- As you reflect on your own family life, what are the blessings and the joys which you have experienced?
- In what ways have you found yourself helped by the Church's teaching on marriage and family? What has been difficult for you?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Luke 2: 41-52

REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.



After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour. (Luke 2:41-52)



Families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity". (*Amoris Laetitia* 7)

POPE FRANCIS CELEBRATES THE JOY AND LOVE



Pope Francis celebrates The Joy And Love to be found at the heart of family life and sees this as good news for the Church (*Amoris Laetitia* 1). He rejoices that many people marry and desire to form a family, although many people say that marriage is in crisis and question its value.

Family love is passionate, builds friendships, shows affection and is sacrificial in caring for the needs of others. A mother or father cares for the crying baby in the early hours of the morning. Parents live with the hormonal challenges of teenagers. Adult children support an elderly parent who suffers from dementia or is simply frail and cannot manage day-to-day tasks. Pope Francis wants to share this joy with others. He has spoken with tenderness about his own family and has loving memories of his grandmother Rosa.

The Pope recognises that the crisis in the family is one of the challenges facing both society and the Church. The stability of personal relationships is often weak and there are changing forms of family life. The Pope's showed his passion and deep concern for



the family early in his pontificate when he decided to hold two meetings or synods to reflect on this theme.

The word 'synod' means 'walking together'. The Extraordinary Synod on the Family held in October 2014 was a preparation for a meeting of bishops in 2015. His approach of holding two synods and involving many people was creative and new. He wanted to hear as many voices as possible. You will remember the invitation to participate in a world-wide consultation by questionnaire, the contributions of those involved with marriage and family life ministry, and the opening address of the Pope asking those present to listen carefully and then speak boldly.

In Chapter 1, 'In the light of the Word', the Pope examines family life in the scriptures and shows how God is lovingly present in all the ups and downs of family life. Marriage is blessed by God and the gift of a child a real blessing. In a rich description of married life, we read "the couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon... capable of revealing God the Creator and Saviour". (Amoris Laetitia 11) Fruitful love becomes a symbol of God's inner life. Man and woman find their happiness and fulfilment in loving relationships. A home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and blessing is a domestic church.

Suffering and bloodshed also run through the Bible stories (Cain and Abel, the infidelity of King David, the suffering Job). Families who are refugees can see their lives through the lens of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. The Prodigal Son shows us that love bears fruit in mercy and forgiveness. God remains faithful even when the human family is unfaithful. We are invited to read our own family lives in the light of the word of God.

SHARE

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- If you had been invited to the synod, what would you have liked to say to the bishops?
- How can we help people grow in their understanding of marriage and family as an 'icon of God'?
- How can the Bible help Christian faith be handed on today in the family?



RESPOND

- How might you support young mums in handing on the faith to their children?
- How can you help people to understand the importance of 'tenderness' in family life?
- How can you support families that are struggling economically in your parish?

CLOSING PRAYER

**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.**

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*





WEEK 2 LOVE IS...

PIA MATTHEWS



2



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, we thank you for your great gift of love. We thank you for love that grows ever more precious in our lives together and for the bonds that help us grow closer each day. We thank you for the joys we share and for the grace you give us to face sorrows together. Help us to grow in forgiveness of each other, in tenderness to each other, and in kind hospitality to all those we meet on our journey together. Above all, help us to remember that we love because You have loved us first.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

Type 'love is...!' into your computer search engine and you will find all kinds of quotes from the comic to the sentimental. We can find many stories of couples celebrating significant wedding anniversaries in our local newspapers. They too will have their own definition of love and words of advice for a successful marriage.

Even if these stories are often buried in the bad news that surrounds us, these good news stories can be a source of true hope. These stories and the witness of couples in our parishes show us that faithful love, love that overcomes difficulty, love that forgives, love that heals, is a real possibility (and it often comes with a sense of humour). God willing, with the arrival of children, we come to realise that love is not shared in the sense that the more people there are, the less portion of love each has. Rather, love grows, deepens and broadens out to welcome new members into the family.

Married couples who have been together for many years often speak about the joy of married love, a joy that can hold the same space as frustration, sorrow and even grief. This joy expresses the love of two people who are not simply gazing at each other but are looking outward in the same direction.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- What good news stories about married life have influenced your outlook on marriage?
- How can the family make God's love more clearly present in society?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Corinthians 13:4-7

St Paul offers us some of the features of true love.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."



Love always gives life

(Amoris Laetitia 165)

REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

In Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis speaks about love in marriage and then in Chapter 5 he speaks about love made fruitful. It is important to take these two chapters together because married love is a love that is faithful, that creates a profound unity between the couple. It always increases and looks beyond itself to the family and wider community, even if the couple are not able to have their own children.



As a focus for married love, Pope Francis reflects on a passage from St Paul that is often heard at weddings. Although St Paul is speaking to diverse groups of Christians in Corinth where there seem to be difficulties and tensions, what St Paul has to say applies also to the family as the 'domestic Church'. Certainly there are difficulties and tensions in marriage, but these can be overcome by love that is patient, kind, thoughtful, generous, forgiving, and at the service of others.

This love is not a mere feeling. Rather it is a commitment in word and deed to the good of the other person. This love is not about power or importance. Rather, it is about loving kindness, gentle respect and an open attitude to others. It is love that seeks more to love than to be loved, which is why it is often the little things that make love grow.

The source of all love, including married love, is God's love for us that springs up and overflows in the love of the family. This love grows out of the experience of being loved and forgiven by God. At times, the power of this love is countercultural because, in the face of whatever might threaten it, this love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Married love is a joy because it is an expansion of the heart that can give space to pain and sorrow, as well as happiness and consolation. Married love is also the place for dialogue and real communication.

In step with Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, Pope Francis reminds us that desires, feelings and emotions are valuable aspects of our human nature. These aspects need to be integrated and positively channelled so that we become mature and responsible human beings who are properly mindful and respectful of other human beings.

Married love is always fruitful. God willing, the couple will have children and Pope Francis draws attention to the specific gifts of mothers and fathers, both of whom are needed to create the best environment for bringing up a family. The Pope also recognises the deep sadness of couples who are unable to have their own children. These couples are also a family and they can experience the fruitfulness of love in the welcome and hospitality they show to others. For Pope Francis, the family should have 'a big heart', embracing grandparents, in-laws, brothers and sisters, where each has an important role to play. Moreover, family life calls for loving concern and affirmation of the dignity of each member of the family, especially the littlest and the ones in need. Similarly, this 'family spirit' is needed in society. By their witness to human dignity and their social concern, families can make God's love present in a concrete way in society.



SHARE

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- "Dialogue and communication are essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life." What attitudes do we need to develop for authentic dialogue?
- "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40). What relevance does this have both inside the family and in the family's interaction in society?

RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Look out for ways to express small acts of kindness, even if it is only to say 'please' and 'thank you'
- Take time really to stop and listen to a member of your family
- If you have not spoken to a close relative for a long time for whatever reason, is now the time to get in touch again?



CLOSING PRAYER



**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.**

Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*



Η ΑΓΑΠΗ ΤΟΥ
ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ



WEEK 3 I WILL...

PIA MATTHEWS





GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, help those who are preparing to grow together in marriage. Help them to found and build their home not on the sands of sentiment which come and go, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from You. Strengthen our wills so that we may overcome the culture of the temporary by entrusting ourselves to your Son, Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Inspire our hearts with the Holy Spirit so that we may seek the true good of everyone we meet and so build up a truly human society.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

On St Valentine's Day in 2014, Pope Francis met with some engaged couples who were preparing for marriage. These couples asked the Pope about some of the key challenges that they faced, challenges that we can all recognise. Nicholas and Marie Alexia explained that many people think that life-long fidelity is too challenging and that the struggle to live together may be difficult, even impossible. Stefano and Valentina wanted advice on how to learn to love. Even among couples of good will there is a "fear of forever", of commitment and uncertainty about how to love.

On another occasion, a young married couple said that they felt the joy of their marriage challenged by a society that places individual well-being and personal self-fulfillment at the centre of relationships. Pope Francis explains that courage is necessary in marriage. Couples need courage to overcome egoism, to challenge the culture of the temporary, and to have confidence in their God-given strength to embrace and live their vocation.

Speaking in December 2017 to people working at the Vatican, the Pope said that he also suffers when he knows that one of their families is going through a crisis. It is vital, he says, to try to ask for help in time and he asks everyone to "take care of the family. It's the greatest treasure because God created us as a family".



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- What do you see as the greatest challenges to married life today?
- What do you think Pope Francis means by “take care of the family”?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Romans 12:13

“Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship, keep praying regularly: share with any of God’s holy people who are in need; look for opportunities to be hospitable.”

(Romans 12:13)



What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them.” *(Amoris Laetitia 35)*

REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

Catholic social teaching sees the family as the first natural community where we experience social living together. In the family, we first learn love and responsibility, our uniqueness and also our connectedness. As the “first society”, families make a decisive contribution to the good of society as a whole. However, Church teaching, and our own experience, tells us that a happy picture of the family is not reflected everywhere and in every family.



In Chapter 2 of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis draws on his own experiences and on pastoral insights from around the world to look at the experience and challenges many families face today. Significantly, Pope Francis explores current realities after his scriptural reflection on the family. If we focus first and foremost on difficulties and challenges we may become overwhelmed and filled with a sense of helplessness. Instead, the Pope asks us to journey together in order to understand reality with the eyes of faith and heart of God. In this way, we can bring out the value and beauty of family life.

In speaking about the complexity of today's family, Pope Francis points to areas of light and shadow. Major areas of light include the growing recognition of the importance of good communication between husband and wife, parents and children, where each member of the family is seen as a person in his or her own right. A developing acknowledgment of women's rights and equal dignity enhances family life as does the recognition of the importance of a father figure. Families who care for children with disabilities and elderly relatives are significant witnesses to human dignity and worth.

Pope Francis also recognises the way in which the presentation of Church teaching has contributed to some of the shadows. He applies a "healthy dose of self-criticism" to the times when the teaching has appeared abstract, idealised or burdensome; when we, because we are the Church, have found it hard to make room for the consciences of people who are trying to respond as best they can to the Gospel; when we have not shown compassion in difficult situations.

However many of the shadows have their roots in a world culture that gives less support to families, that drives a rapid pace of life, that fosters individualism and the satisfaction of desires and choices over commitment, relationships and the good of others. In this culture, people choose family life only when it is convenient, and reject it when it becomes tiresome. In today's world of uncertainty and ambiguity, people fear both loneliness and entrapment in relationships. The possibility of too many options means that marriage is seen as curtailing independence. Children become a restriction on freedom. The consumer throw-away culture now seems to apply to relationships as well.

Certainly, economic hardship, forced migration, exploitation, and addictive behaviours remain significant stress factors. However Pope Francis also notes the tendency towards an affective, emotional and narcissistic immaturity in many approaches to relationships.

For Pope Francis, a strong stable committed relationship of marriage not only remedies this tendency, but is an important value for society as a whole. Today's 'culture of the ephemeral' can be addressed by fostering a 'culture of vocation' to marriage where to love is to will the good of the other.



SHARE

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- What does the idea of marriage as a vocation mean to you?
- Love is often associated with emotions and feelings. What does the sentence, 'love is to will the good of the other' mean to you?

 RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions.

- Can you think of ways in which you can support a new family in your parish community?
- Take a moment to pray for couples who are experiencing difficulties in their marriage
- If you are married, think about the witness you give others to the beauty of married life



CLOSING PRAYER



**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.**

Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
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Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
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Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*



WEEK 4
I DO...

PIA MATTHEWS





GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, give your grace to all those preparing for marriage so that they can truly discern your will for them. Help us all to see that You have entrusted the entirety of our life to us as a mission where every moment and every decision has its place. Give us a spirit of holiness and openness to your grace so that we can learn to die to our selfish desires and rise anew with your Son, Jesus Christ.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

For many people, getting engaged is an exciting time and a reason to celebrate. Becoming engaged moves a relationship onto a new level. The newly engaged couple feels that each of them has found ‘the one’, that person that can make them truly happy and with whom they want to spend their life. Engagement is also the time for planning for the big day ahead when they say, “I do”.

It may come as a surprise to some couples that the Church is also concerned with preparation for marriage, and this is not simply for the wedding ceremony itself or for completing the necessary paperwork. Initially, some couples do not see the value of attending a ‘course’ about marriage: perhaps they think it is just about information on what the Church teaches, or a ‘hoop’ to go through. If they are already living together they may feel they know enough about what their future life together will be like. Perhaps one person is not a Catholic and is worried about what to expect.

However, marriage preparation is a process and good preparation gives a couple the time and space to make the most of their period of engagement so that it becomes a time of genuine discernment and spiritual growth towards the vocation of marriage. The couple can then say, “I do” with a clear understanding of the covenant they are making.

SHARE 

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- In some cases marriage preparation may lead the couple to decide not to marry after all. Is this a failure of the preparation process?
- If you are married or involved in preparing couples for marriage, what is your experience of marriage preparation?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Philippians 4:4-7

“I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)



Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope” *(Amoris Laetitia 219)*

REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

Learning to love is a project for a lifetime. In an ideal world, ‘remote’ preparation begins at birth. Children learn to love from the experience of being loved in a family that is bonded together by stable and lasting relationships. ‘Proximate’ preparation happens as the young person receives catechesis and formation. ‘Immediate’ preparation takes



place from the moment when the engaged couple approach the Church to discuss their intention to marry. Learning to love continues into the new marriage as the couple learn more about each other, face everyday trials and joys together and God willing have and bring up their own children. And so the cycle continues.

However, it is becoming clear that many young people are missing out on some of these stages of preparation. Notably, some children and young people do not have the experience of a happy, stable family life. We can see then that good marriage preparation can have far reaching consequences beyond simply preparing for the 'big day'. As Pope Francis frequently says: "Families are not a problem, they are first and foremost an opportunity."

In Chapter 6 of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis looks at marriage preparation from some pastoral perspectives. Traditionally Christian families are called 'domestic churches' and the parish is "the family of families". Good preparation for the vocation of marriage should involve Christian families, clergy and catechists. All those involved, including priests, should be properly trained and formed for this ministry. In order to connect to people's real problems and expectations, training should be grounded in concrete practical ways, drawing also on professional expertise.

Good preparation not only helps the couple understand and accept Church teaching, it fosters the virtues, develops communication skills, encourages a firm resolve to deal with problems, and uncovers the problem of unrealistic or mismatched expectations. Good preparation equips the couple with some of the practical tools and skills they need and it also demonstrates that love needs time and space, good communication, little gestures, spending time together and growth in faith. This is why couples should be encouraged to pray together and to meditate on scripture.

One central question to ask of preparation programmes is how do we help people to discover the dignity and beauty of marriage, the deep meaning of sexuality, and the proper care and upbringing of children? For Pope Francis part of this beauty is that "each marriage is a kind of 'salvation history': husband and wife help to form each other; they come to understand each other's weaknesses and come to know the person each one truly is. They learn to see life as a common project and to put the good of the family above their own individual good. Times of crisis can become an apprenticeship in growing closer together. Reconciliation and the celebration of the sacraments help to heal old wounds, and lead to conversion and authentic human growth.

Support for the newly married couple should continue throughout the early years of the marriage and this in itself can be enriching for the parish community. The wedding ceremony is not the end of the road: by saying, "I do" the couple begin a journey that requires generosity, commitment, and courage and so they need God's grace and the help of their friends, family and community.



SHARE 

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- Pope Francis says that Christian families are the “principal agents” for work with families: what does this mean to you?
- What does the phrase “I do” mean to you? How does it differ from “I will”?

RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Are there ways in which you can become involved in remote and proximate preparation either in your own family life or in the life of your parish community?
- Do you know of anyone who needs particular support at this time? This may include people who are divorced and remarried and feel outsiders in their Church community.
- The next time you have to make a big decision, think about it in the context of what God wants of you.



CLOSING PRAYER



**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.**

Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*





WEEK 5 A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

PIA MATTHEWS



5



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, look with mercy on families that show signs of wounded and troubled love. Help those entrusted with the care of families to accompany them with compassion, to enlighten them if they have lost their way, and to guide them if they are in the midst of a storm so that with the aid of Your grace they can find new hope and confidence. As we remember that You chose to save us by sending Your Son, Jesus, into the world in a human family which was open to receive Him in love, may our families always be open to your loving presence.



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud:

At the 2015 Synod for the Family, the synod that led up to *Amoris Laetitia*, one of the bishops spoke about a man in his congregation. This man regularly attended Church with his family. He welcomed parishioners at the door, he brought up the collection. It was only at his daughter's first Holy Communion that the bishop realised that he had never seen the man receive the Eucharist.

The bishop took time to talk to the man and it transpired that some years ago the man had left his wife and children, obtained a divorce and was now remarried with a new family. The man had never thought of approaching any priest, never mind the bishop, to discuss his situation.

Convinced that the Church would not be able to help him, he mistakenly believed that an annulment would make the children of his first family illegitimate. Moreover, he found his previous situation so painful that he did not want to 'rake over old ground'. Resigned to sitting at the back of church, the man told his bishop that he was not sure of his real 'place' in the church.



SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- In some cases marriage preparation may lead the couple to decide not to marry after all. Is this a failure of the preparation process?
- If you are married or involved in preparing couples for marriage, what is your experience of marriage preparation?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Luke 19:1-7

“He entered Jericho and was going through the town and suddenly a man, Zacchaeus, made his appearance. He was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see where Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today’. And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.” (Luke 19:1-7)



I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth.” *(Amoris Laetitia, 312)*



REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

The beautiful witness of couples who have celebrated many years of marriage shows that a lasting, stable Christian marriage is a real possibility. Certainly we have seen that no marriage is without its challenges. Good preparation, prayer, recourse to the sacraments, practical skills in relationship building, and openness to conversion and change can give couples the grace and virtues they need to face these challenges together. Nevertheless there are relationships, “irregular situations” that do not yet or no longer correspond to the Church’s teaching on marriage.

In Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis explains that people who are baptised but in irregular situations still belong to the Church and still should experience the Church as “a mother who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel”. Our discussions so far have shown that some couples enter a civil marriage or simply live together for many reasons including fear of commitment, affective immaturity, or because they fail to appreciate the beauty of Christian marriage. The Church needs to enter into “pastoral dialogue” with these couples to lead them to a “greater openness to the Gospel of marriage in its fullness”. Situations that no longer correspond to the Church’s teaching include those where a person is divorced and remarried while their spouse is still alive. Church communities should ensure that they are integrated into their communities since integration is “the key” to their pastoral care.

Pope Francis often refers to the Church as a “field hospital”. A field hospital temporarily takes care of the wounded on-site before they are transferred to somewhere more permanent for treatment. As Pope Francis says in his exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (#42), even when someone’s life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated, God is present there. As the saying goes, God loves us as we are, He just does not want to leave us there.

The way of the Church is the way of Christ, the way of truth and mercy. Through truth and mercy, the Church has the responsibility of helping people “understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God’s plan for them”. This calls for a process of accompaniment and discernment because people’s lives and situations are complex and often entangled.



In accompanying the person, the Church journeys alongside them and helps them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church. The process of discernment gives the person the opportunity to reflect with humility and repentance on their personal responsibility, on the consequences of their actions for their spouse, children and their new relationship if there is one, on how they could have acted differently.

Discernment springs from love of the Church and her teaching “in a sincere search for God’s will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it”. Discernment, and through it the formation of the person’s conscience, also recognises “with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God”, all the while being open to new stages of growth towards what God is asking.

SHARE 

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- People’s lives are often complicated. How often do I thank God for the blessings He has given me, including the blessing of His great mercy?
- At times when my life has felt like a ship wreck, how have I been open to the presence of God?

RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- How has God gifted you and your family? How can you and your family enrich the life of your parish community?
- Spend time to pray for those who took part in this year’s World Meeting of Families and for the country of Ireland.



CLOSING PRAYER



**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.**

Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*





WEEK 6 HOME IS A HOLY PLACE

BISHOP JOHN WILSON



6



GATHER



The group leader invites the group to pray the Opening Prayer together.

OPENING PRAYER

*God our loving Father,
we thank you for sending your Son Jesus to be born of Mary
and placed under the care of Joseph.
Help us to learn from the Holy Family of Nazareth
the lessons of family loving and living.
May the Holy Spirit sanctify our family relationships,
so that our homes become, evermore deeply,
schools of charity and virtue, and places of prayer of devotion.
May families fulfil their mission of witness to the beauty of faith, hope and love,
lived out in and through the domestic church, so that our homes become holy places.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.*



LISTEN TO THE EXPERIENCE



Take a few minutes to read the following three short reflections silently or aloud:

“Family life can only be lived in the nitty-gritty of reality with all its successes and failures. You see adverts for family-friendly events called ‘messy church’. That’s a good description of the vocation, the Christian calling, of the family. Jesus was born into a family and He’s present in our families, in our up and downs, inviting us to grow and love through them.”

“I wish I could wrap my children in a protective shield, to grow up in safety, without dealing with ‘adult’ things until they’re ready. TV and social media are great, but can undermine the values I want my children to have. I can’t surround them in cotton wool, but I don’t want my family to fall victim to destructive images and messages. I want to know what they’re learning and spend time together talking about what matters. I want us to care for each other, learning and sharing together, in faith and love.”



“The saying goes, ‘the family that prays together, stays together’. There’s a truth here, even if it’s not always simple. The basic question is how is Christ the centre and bedrock of our home? The best example I can give is my own witness, including saying sorry. The world’s a changing place, but some things remain true. Sunday Mass is something we share as a family. We might be late, but it matters to us.”

SHARE

The leader invites people to take a few moments to reflect on what you have heard or read. Then share your reflections on the following questions:

- What do you think it means to speak of the ‘vocation of the family’?
- What do you think is required for the best possible formation and education of children?
- What does it mean to put faith into practice in the family home?

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES



Sometime before the meeting, the leader should ask a member of the group to be prepared to read the Scripture passage.

Listen to Colossians 3:12-17

“You are God’s chosen race, his saints; he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body. Always be thankful. Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and inspired songs to God and never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col 3:12-17)



The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place."

(Amoris Laetitia, 315)

REFLECT



Take a few moments in silence to reflect on the scripture. Savour a word, a phrase, a question or a feeling that rises up in you. Then read the following reflection, silently or aloud:

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes "in and among families the Gospel message should always resound". (*Amoris Laetitia* 58) In the domestic Church, each member is a preacher, teacher and witnesses of the Gospel. How symbolic it might be, in preparation for marriage or the baptismal liturgy, to hand the Book of the Gospels to the engaged, or parents, with the words: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach."

Families have an educational role in supporting, guiding and directing, their children, seeking to help them "grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy". (*Amoris Laetitia* 260-262) Parents can never completely delegate the moral formation of their children to others.

Pope Francis describes the family as the "first school of human values". It teaches patience, self-mastery and detachment so that we can develop and enrich our self-esteem.



Catholic schools are vital in supporting families. Says *Amoris Laetitia*, we need to encourage their mission of helping pupils mature into adults seeing the world with a love of Jesus, and understanding life as a call to serve God. Technology and social media can encourage young people to live a ‘virtual’ existence, prone to fantasy, indulgence and manipulation, separate from the real world.

In the family, we join in caring for the environment as our common home.

In passing on faith, “the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour”. (*Amoris Laetitia* 287) Parents are the “active agents in catechesis” (*Amoris Laetitia* 287) and witnesses to prayer so that the Good News resounds in all families. The experience of family life should lead us to believe in God’s love for every one of us. Pastoral care for families should enable “them to be both domestic churches and a leaven of evangelisation in society”. (*Amoris Laetitia* 290)

Family life should encourage a deeper relationship with God. Simple daily prayerfulness, nourished by popular devotions and piety, culminates in the family sharing the Eucharist, especially on Sundays.

As well as describing the family as “the nearest hospital” and emphasising the dignity of each individual member, Pope Francis highlights the importance of hospitality in the family. There should be a reaching out by its members and a welcoming of others, particularly the poor and neglected. The family’s “never-ending vocation [is] born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 325)

SHARE

In a few moments of silence, consider the questions below. Then share your reflections.

- In what way do you think the scripture passage relates to family life?
- How would you describe the mission of the family in raising and educating children and young people?
- What would you say are the important elements of the spirituality of marriage and family life today?



RESPOND

The leader invites people to take a few moments in silence to reflect on the questions. Then share your reflections.

- Make a special effort to pray for families, asking the intercession of Our Blessed Lady and St Joseph
- Next time you are in church and a parent or family looks anxious because a child is noisy, offer them a smile or a word of support afterwards
- What might your parish provide to help families pray together at home?

CLOSING PRAYER

The leader, or another member of the group, who has been advised in advance, then leads the group in the closing prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the gift of faith passed on by the family of the Church and the domestic family in the home.

We ask you to keep us attentive to the needs of families in teaching the faith to their children.

Help each of us to play our part in making our churches welcoming to families.

Strengthen the mission of our schools in educating and forming young disciples.

Inspire our parishes in reaching out to support family spirituality.

Bless all families as they witness to the presence of your love among them.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen



CLOSING PRAYER



**God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.**

Bless us with the joy of love.

**Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.**

Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

**Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:**

We pause and remember family members and others by name.

**Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.**

This we ask, through Christ our Lord,

Amen

Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.

Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.

Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.





AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

www.gracewing.co.uk/page77.html

SEXUALITY EXPLAINED

www.gracewing.co.uk/page454.html

These books, *As I have Loved You* and *Sexuality Explained* are wonderful resources to help parents talk to their children about sexual development and the responsibilities that come with it.

ASSOCIATION OF INTERCHURCH FAMILIES

<http://www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk/>

In both supporting and speaking for families who are in interchurch or mixed marriages, we provide a range of services and opportunities.

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE

Beginning Experience offers weekend residential programmes to those who have lost a partner through death, desertion, separation or divorce, to help them come to terms with their grief so that they can begin again.

Telephone: 01992 642 443 (John Brotherton)

Email: johnbrotherton@hotmail.co.uk

BEING A PARENT TODAY

www.ctsbooks.org/being-a-parent-today

A lovely little book of practical pointers on helping to care for your children. Edited by Fr. Stephen Wang.

CALLED TO SERVE THE SICK

<http://rcdow.org.uk/called-to-serve-the-sick/resources/>

Families can participate together in this initiative of Cardinal Vincent Nichols.

CARE FOR THE FAMILY

www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Care for the Family is a national charity which aims to promote strong family life and to help those hurting because of family breakdown.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

www.catholicfamily.org.uk

The Bishops' dedicated Marriage and Family Life website signposts information and sources of support for marriage and family life across the Catholic Community in England and Wales.

CATHOLIC GRANDPARENTS ASSOCIATION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.com

Supporting, equipping and encouraging grandparents in their vocation.

CATHOLIC MARRIAGE PREPARATION INC.

www.catholicmarriageprep.com

Marriage Preparation for engaged couples with time or distance constraints. Originating from the Diocese of Denver in the USA, with official approval of the hierarchy, this web-based online course is ideal for all engaged couples and even as a refresher programme on the theology of marriage for spouses.

CATHOLIC MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

<http://www.catholicmentalhealthproject.org.uk/helplines>

In 2006, a small working group within the Marriage and Family Life Project Office (CBCEW) met to consider how best the spiritual and pastoral needs of families affected by mental illness could be better supported. For Helplines & support services.

CEDAR

www.cedar.uk.net

The Domestic Abuse Working Group (DAWG) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales have gathered here a range of resources under the banner of CEDAR (Catholics Experiencing Domestic Abuse Resources). They will help parishes, deaneries, dioceses, school and organisations in the Catholic Church in England and Wales grow in awareness of the issues surrounding domestic abuse.



CHILD HEALING

www.childhealing.com

Educates parents about the common symptoms and causes of emotional, cognitive and behavioural conflicts in youth.

COUPLES FOR CHRIST

www.couplesforchristglobal.org

Evangelistic and missionary community for families, focussing on building strong and vibrant Christian communities throughout the world.

CITY CRISIS PREGNANCY

www.citypregnancy.org.uk

15a Lamb's Passage, Off Bunhill Row, London, EC1Y 8LE. A charity supported by the diocese offering a listening/counselling/psychotherapy service for those seeking support as a result of an unexpected pregnancy.

Telephone: 020 7638 5440

CTS FAMILY MATTERS SERIES

www.ctsbooks.org/marriage-and-family

From the Catholic Truth Society, offering a number of easily digestible books and booklets on marriage and family life. The CTS Marriage and Family series is a valuable resource for spouses and parents looking for information on the Church's teaching on marriage and family.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

<http://www.internetsafety101.org/>

Internet safety for children.

EWTN KIDS

<http://www.ewtn.com/ewtnkids/home.asp>

Great Catholic website and club for children.

EXPLORE RELATIONSHIPS

<https://www.explorereationships.org.uk/>

Enabling young people to explore the realities of lasting relationships.

Email: charlottesmernerlin@rcdow.org.uk

FAMILIES OF NAZARETH

International movement of Catholic families, single people, priests and religious aiming to find and pursue a path to personal sanctity.

info@familiesofnazareth.org.uk

Telephone: 01462 893 127

FAMILY AND YOUTH CONCERN

www.famyouth.org.uk

National Educational trust to research the causes and consequences of family breakdown and remedies for restoring family founded upon marriage as the fundamental building block of civilisations.

FAMILY CARING TRUST

www.familycaring.co.uk

Supporting and empowering parents and providing practical resources to improve family relationships.

FAMILY GROUPS MOVEMENT

www.catholicfamily.org.uk//projects/parish-family-groups

International organisation founded by the Passionists to build Christian communities through the development of extended families. Present in several parishes in the Diocese of Westminster.

Email: hannah.moruzz@cbcew.org.uk

FAMILIES NEED FATHERS

www.fnf.org.uk

Families Need Fathers (FNF) is a registered charity providing support to divorced and separated parents, irrespective of gender or marital status on shared parenting issues arising from family breakdown. FNF's primary concern is to maintain the child's relationship with both parents.

Email: fnf@fnf.org.uk or admin@fnf.org.uk

Helpline: 0300 0300 363



GINGERBREAD

Gingerbread is a support organisation for lone parents and their children throughout England and Wales. Details from: Gingerbread, 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, London NW5 1TL

Email: info@gingerbread.org.uk

Telephone: 020 7428 5400

Helpline: 0808 802 0925

GOOD COUNSEL NETWORK

Helping to encourage and enable women, through emotional and financial support, to find positive solutions to difficult situations in pregnancy and beyond, enabling them to choose life for their babies.

Telephone: 020 7723 1740

Email: info@goodcounselnetwork.freemove.co.uk

GRIEF TO GRACE

www.griegtograceuk.org

A Catholic team specialising in the healing of post-abuse trauma, whether physical, psychological, sexual or spiritual. Grief to Grace are based in Kensington, London and offer residential programmes which are held in various retreat centres in the South of England.

HOME IS A HOLY PLACE

www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk

Bishops' Conference project raising awareness of God's presence in the home.

PASSING ON THE FAITH

www.passingonthefaith.org.uk

Following on from Home is a Holy Place, resources and support to help parents and grandparents to pass on the Catholic faith.

INTER FAITH MARRIAGE NETWORK

www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk

Supportive network for mixed-faith couples. Sponsored by Churches Together.

JESSE BOX

www.thejessebox.com

Introducing children to scripture stories through interactive play. Bringing parents and children together around the Bible, the Jesse Box is a catechetical tool enabling children to walk through the stories of the Bible and then recreate the story using arts and crafts.

Email: paul@thejessebox.com

K4J

www.k4j.org

The KIDS4JESUS Family offers a link between home, school and parish.

LOVING4LIFE

<http://loving4life.co.uk/>

Marriage Enrichment retreats offering weekends for married couples, leading them into deeper intimacy and greater appreciation of their masculine and feminine uniqueness.

Email: jane@loving4life.net

Mobile : 07595 724 300

For more information about upcoming workshops please contact the numbers above.

Venue: Dowry House, Basilica of Our Lady, 47-49 High Street Walsingham, Norfolk, NR22 6B.

MARITAL HEALING

www.maritalhealing.com

Educating spouses, marital therapists and clergy about the common causes of conflicts in marriage.

MARRIAGE CARE

www.marriagecare.org.uk

Marriage Care specialises in helping couples build and sustain strong, fulfilling, healthy marriages, and in providing support in times of relationship difficulty, through the work of nearly 700 volunteers based at 52 centres around England and Wales.

Email: info@marriagecare.org.uk

Telephone: 800 389 3801

(for appointments, bookings and enquiries)



MARYVALE INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

www.maryvale.ac.uk

Centre for studies in Marriage and Family Life, offering quality distance learning courses at all levels.

MOTHERS PRAYERS

www.mothersprayers.org

For mothers who wish to pray together for their children and grandchildren.

MOTHERS APART FROM THEIR CHILDREN (MATCH)

www.matchmothers.org

This site is for mothers living apart from their children, and mothers who have little or no contact with their children. Sometimes separations last for many years, sometimes forever. MATCH is entirely supportive across the world.

Email: enquiries@matchmothers.org

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILIES

www.catholic-family.org

Moral, spiritual and social support for families to preserve Catholic family values.

NATURAL FERTILITY AWARENESS (NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING)

<http://rcdow.org.uk/diocese/marriage-and-family-life/resources/natural-family-planning/>

A source of information for those couples who are trying to learn about their fertility in order to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

Email: family@rcdow.org.uk

NATIONAL PARENTING INITIATIVE

<https://www.thenpi.org.uk/>

The NPI was set up in January 2012 by a group of parenting professionals and senior church leaders from all over the UK. The goal is to encourage parenting courses in every corner of our four nations and to make it easy for parents to access them.

PAPYRUS

www.papyrus-uk.org

Papyrus is a national UK charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide and provides confidential help and advice to young people and anyone worried about a young person.

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

SMS: 07786 209697

Helpline: 0800 068 4141

(HopeLineUK staffed by trained professionals)

PEANUT BUTTER AND GRACE

www.pbgrace.com

A wonderful online resource for Catholic family spirituality, offering ideas, practical suggestions, prayers, articles and books for practising the faith as a family and keeping the faith alive.

PILGRIM QUEEN OF THE FAMILY

www.pilgrimqueen.org

Encouraging families to group together to pray the rosary, asking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. History of the Guadalupe apparition, fascinating facts and testimonies of answered prayers.

PURE ONLINE PROJECT

www.pureonline.com

Confidential and professional help for men and women to assist recovery from internet and other sex-related addictions.

RACHEL'S VINEYARD

www.rachelsvineyard.org.uk

Rachel's Vineyard cares for any person who has struggled with the emotional and spiritual pain of abortion. Offering weekend retreats throughout the year, the retreat is an opportunity to get away from the daily pressures of work and family, to focus on a painful time in life, and to begin healing through a supportive and non-judgemental process.

Mobile: 07851 331 816 (Pam, Southern England)
or 07505 904 656 (Marene, Northern England)



RELATE

www.relate.org.uk

Relate is the UK's largest provider of relationship counselling and sex therapy. They also offer a range of other relationship support services.

Telephone: 0300 100 1234

RETRouvaille

www.retrouvaille.org.uk

Retrouvaille is the name of a programme designed to help heal and renew marriages. It is for couples in serious difficulty or even separated. The word 'Retrouvaille' simply means 'rediscovery'.

Mobile from within UK: 07887 296983 or 0797 338 0443 *Phone or text us with your phone number and we will call you back.*

SMARTLOVING ENGAGED

www.smartloving.org/engaged

Marriage Preparation Resource. An easy way for parishes to provide courses using their own parishioners as facilitators. Information for Mentors & Parish Leaders including how to order hard copies of the SmartLoving Engaged books <https://smartloving.org/uk-mentor/>

SMARTLOVING ENGAGED ONLINE

<https://smartloving.org/engaged/online/>

The same format as the face-to-face curriculum but in an easily accessible online format for couples who struggle to find a parish-based course or who are separated by distance.

SMARTLOVING BREAKTHROUGH WORKSHOP

Is a 3 hour practical, solution-focused event for all stages of marriage. Drawing on contemporary research and Catholic theology, this workshop will arm you with skills and insights to transform your relationship into the thriving, joy-filled encounter that it is meant to be. For more information about upcoming workshops please contact family@rcdow.org.uk

TALK2GOD

www.catholicireland.net/talk2god/

Leading children into prayer.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

www.teamsgb.org.uk

International Catholic movement for Christian married couples, providing support and encouragement to each other on their spiritual journey and daily lives.

THE WEDNESDAY WORD

www.wednesdayword.org

The Word of God connecting home, school and parish. Structured around the Sunday Gospel, this weekly leaflet is designed to include the whole family.

TWO IN ONE FLESH

<http://www.twoinoneflesh.org.uk/>

Offers marital reflections on Sunday readings, helping couples discover what relevance each Sunday's scripture readings can have for them.

UNION OF CATHOLIC MOTHERS

www.theucm.co.uk

Email: srbrigid@gmail.com

Telephone: 020 7286 6387

WORLDWIDE MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER ENGLAND AND WALES

www.wwme.org.uk

Marriage Encounter weekends for couples wishing to revitalise their marriages.

Engaged Encounter weekends providing marriage preparation for engaged couples.

THE PRAYER OF BLESSING OF THE ICON FOR THE WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES 2018

Lord our God, you created us in your own image and likeness. You redeemed us from sin through Christ Jesus, your Son, lover of the human race. Taking upon himself the form of a servant and becoming one with us in our flesh, he makes all creation new in the image of your original blessedness. We ask you to send your blessing upon this icon by the sprinkling of holy water and anointing with holy oil. Make it holy to your glory, in honour and remembrance of Jesus your Beloved Son, our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother, St Joseph, her husband, and the Archangels, Michael and Gabriel. May this icon draw us to the Holy Family who invite us to their table. May it help us contemplate your saving Gospel and see in the wedding feast of Cana and the raising of Jairus' daughter your look of infinite compassion upon all the concerns of marriage and family life. May those who pray before this icon find the comfort of your grace and your help in their every need. We ask this through the bounteous love of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

