

Missionary Families of Christ

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

The Marriage Enrichment Retreat (MER) is part of the first-year formation program in MFC. The MER is usually given six months after the end of the CLS. All couple-members are expected to take the MER.

Goals of the MER

1. To present to the couple-participants the important areas of Christian marriage and family life, which form the foundation for our life together as married couples and as members of MFC.
2. To foster a better understanding and appreciation of God's plan for marriage and family life, and to get the couple-participants to commit themselves to living out God's plan.
3. To provide the couple-participants with an effective environment of prayer, learning and Christian fellowship, in which they can begin working on their marriage relationship together so that it may be founded more solidly on Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Elements of the MER

There are various elements in the MER that work together in order to provide the couple-participants with an overall environment that is conducive to learning about and living out God's plan and call to them. These elements are:

1. **PRAYER.** Being a retreat, the schedule provides adequate time for both personal and communal prayer. Prayer is an effective way of discovering God's call and responding to that call with faith and humility.
2. **TEACHINGS.** The MER has seven talks that examine important areas of Christian marriage and family life. The talks not only present teachings based on the Bible, but also practical guidelines for daily living.
3. **COUPLE DISCUSSIONS.** After every talk, the husband and wife meet exclusively with each other to discuss what was presented and to consider specific aspects of their marriage and family life that they need to work on.
4. **ACTION PLANNING.** Towards the end of the MER, the couple will again sit down to formulate specific steps they will do in order to put what they have learned into practice.
5. **FELLOWSHIP.** As part of fostering an informal and relaxed atmosphere, and also enhancing the personal relationships among the couple-participants, the MER provides structured interaction throughout the retreat, especially during the evening program and entertainment.
6. **EUCCHARIST.** As the climax to the whole MER, Holy Mass is celebrated. During the Mass, the couples renew their marriage vows and offer to God their action plans.

MER talks

1. Serving God through Christian marriage
2. The Christian couple as a pastoral team
3. The role of a Christian husband
4. The role of a Christian wife
5. Effective communication in marriage
6. Healing our marriages
7. Building our homes for God

Schedule

There are two alternative schedules for the MER.

The first starts on a Friday evening and ends on Sunday at noon. There is one talk on Friday, five talks on Saturday, and a final talk on Sunday. This is the recommended schedule.

An alternative schedule is provided, which starts on Friday evening and ends on Sunday afternoon. Here there is no talk on Friday, four talks on Saturday and three on Sunday. This schedule can be used for situations where the participants may not be able to reach the retreat venue early enough (due to distance, work, traffic). This schedule is longer (with less time for family on Sunday), probably a little more expensive, and provides less cause for celebration on Saturday evening (less inputs and discussion, and no prayers for inner healing yet).

Yet a third schedule is possible, and this is using Schedule B but eliminating Friday evening. The Orientation is inserted on Saturday morning. The advantage is less time invested, with resultant lower cost. However, be aware that this MER is very important for our marriage and family life, and we should think not in terms of investing less time but rather more. Further, if people come late on Saturday morning, the whole schedule is adversely affected.

The MER may be conducted on days other than a weekend.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

SCHEDULE A

FRIDAY

6:00 - 7:00 PM	Arrival, registration and fellowship
7:00 - 7:30	Worship
7:30 - 8:00	Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Explanation of objectives, procedures and expectations from couples* Presentation of schedule* Administrative announcements* Introduction of MER team
8:00 - 8:15	Break
8:15 - 9:00	TALK No. 1
9:00 - 9:30	Couple discussion
9:30 - 10:00	Snacks
10:30	Lights out

SATURDAY

6:30 AM	Wake-up call
7:00 - 8:00	Breakfast
8:00 - 8:30	Worship
8:30 - 9:15	TALK No. 2
9:15 - 9:45	Couple discussion
9:45 - 10:15	Break/snacks
10:15 - 11:00	TALK No. 3
11:00 - 11:05	Stretch break
11:05 - 11:50	TALK No. 4
11:50 - 12:30	Couple discussion
12:30 - 2:00 PM	Lunch and rest
2:00 - 2:30	Songs of praise
2:30 - 3:15	TALK No. 5
3:15 - 3:45	Couple discussion
3:45 - 4:15	Break/snacks
4:15 - 5:45	TALK No. 6 Prayers for healing and forgiveness
5:45 - 7:00	Break/preparation for program
7:00 - 8:00	Dinner
8:00 - 10:00	Program/games/fellowship
10:30	Lights out

SUNDAY

6:30 AM	Wake-up call
7:00 - 8:00	Breakfast
8:00 - 8:30	Worship
8:30 - 9:15	TALK No. 7

9:15 - 9:45	Couple Discussion
9:45 - 10:15	Break/snacks
10:15 - 11:00	Open forum/sharing
11:00 - 11:30	Action planning
11:30 - 12:30	Mass and renewal of marriage vows
12:30 PM	Lunch/Departure

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

SCHEDULE B

FRIDAY

7:30 - 8:30 PM	Arrival, registration and fellowship
8:30 - 9:00	Worship
9:00 - 9:30	Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Explanation of MER objectives, procedures and expectations from participating couples* Administrative announcements* Introduction of MER team
9:30 - 10:00	Snacks
10:30	Lights out

SATURDAY

7:00 AM	Wake-up call
7:30 - 8:30	Breakfast
8:30 - 9:00	Worship
9:00 - 9:45	TALK No. 1
9:45 - 10:15	Couple discussion
10:15 - 10:45	Break/snacks
10:45 - 11:30	TALK No. 2
11:30 - 12:00	Couple discussion
12:00 - 2:00 PM	Lunch and rest
2:00 - 2:30	Songs of praise
2:30 - 3:15	TALK No. 3
3:15 - 3:20	Stretch break
3:20 - 4:05	TALK No. 4
4:05 - 4:30	Break/snacks
4:30 - 5:30	Couple discussion
5:30 - 7:00	Break/Preparation for program
7:00 - 8:00	Dinner
8:00 - 10:00	Program/games/fellowship
10:30	Lights out

Sunday

7:00 AM	Wake-up call
7:30 - 8:15	Breakfast
8:15 - 8:45	Worship
8:45 - 9:30	TALK No. 5
9:30 - 10:00	Couple discussion
10:00 - 10:30	Break/snacks
10:30 - 12:00	TALK No. 6
	Prayers for healing and forgiveness
12:00 - 1:45 PM	Lunch and rest

1:45 - 2:15	Songs of praise
2:15 - 3:00	TALK No. 7
3:00 - 3:30	Couple discussion/snacks
3:30 - 4:00	Open forum/sharing
4:00 - 4:30	Action planning
4:30 - 5:30	Mass and renewal of marriage vows
	Departure

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 1 : SERVING GOD THROUGH CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. Christian marriage is God's plan.

- a) Though Catholics start their life together with God in the picture (i.e., a Church wedding), many do not fully understand God's plan for marriage. Many get married simply to satisfy their own plans and desires.
- b) But Christian marriage is at the very center of God's plan for mankind.
 - * Being so, we need to look beyond our own understanding of marriage and see what God intends.

2. Our vocation as Christians is to know, love and serve God.

- a) Service is one major hallmark of a Christian. We are supposed to be men and women for others.
- b) But many Christian couples feel they have no time or ability to serve God. They are preoccupied with work, personal pursuits, etc.
 - * Such couples miss out on the simple reality that we can serve God right in our marriage and family life. In fact, one of the most important things God expects of us is to build strong marriages and families for Christ.
- c) Conversely, some become very busy with service to Church or parish.
 - * Such couples, though serving God, could end up neglecting the most important task given to them, to serve God through Christian marriage.

B. We can begin to serve God through our marriages by beginning to understand His plan and how we fit in that plan.

1. The family is God's plan for the human race.

- a) Gn 1:27-28, Gn 2:18,24.
 - * From the very beginning, God intended man and woman to become a new unity, and from that unity to multiply and fill the earth.
 - * Man is to have dominion over the rest of creation.

- b) Thus we, and other Christian families, have a very important part in this plan of God. God's plan depends on how we live our marriage and family lives.
 - c) The larger human society is merely a collection of families. Thus, the condition of families will determine to a large extent the condition of society and the world.
- 2. The family is the basic unit of the Church.
 - a) From families come the future generations of the people of God.
 - b) The strength of the Church depends upon the strength of the individual families that comprise it.
 - * Thus MFC is able to support parish life by simply strengthening families in MFC.
- 3. Successful family life administration is considered an essential qualification for serving in the Church. 1 Tm 3:4-5.

Thus as married couples, we serve God by building up strong Christian marriages and families. The fulfilment of God's plan actually depends on what we as married couples decide to do with our family lives.

- C. What God wants of us is a solid, strong home and family. This entails the following elements:
- 1. Being a "light to the world."
 - a) We need to live men and women of God both at home and outside the home.
 - b) We as MFC are an evangelizing community, and this involves the witness of life. Our best witness to others is our Christian family life.
 - 2. No fragmented type of Christian living.
 - a) We begin to live our lives wholly for the Lord. No split-level Christian living.
 - b) We begin to allow our own personal renewal to filter down to all members of our home, and to touch all aspects of our day-to-day lives.
 - c) We live our lives as Christians both in and out of the home, both in and beyond MFC activities.
 - 3. Our personal relationships in the family are lived out according to Christian values and ways.
 - a) We love, honor, respect and serve one another.

- * Our ideal is the unity of the Trinity, the love between Father and Son, our respect as God's children, and serving like Jesus.
 - b) Some enduring values such as obedience, love, honesty, courage and faith are taught and lived out.
 - 4. Children are being raised to know, love and serve God.
 - a) God is at the very center of the home.
 - b) Children are growing up to be obedient and respectful and humble.
 - c) 2 Mc 7 -- the story of a courageous mother and her seven martyred sons.
 - 5. Our home and family become a source of blessing, enrichment and strength for others.
 - a) The home is a place to encounter God, to receive healing and encouragement, like an oasis in a desert.
 - b) The importance of hospitality.
 - 6. Our home is the base from which we do our evangelistic work.
- D. Conclusion.
1. The Lord's ideal for marriage is a lofty one.
 - a) By ourselves, it is unattainable.
 - * In fact, just keeping our marriage intact is already a real challenge. Just consider the record in the world today.
 - * No one starts out on marriage with the thought of splitting up. So why does it happen? Because marriages are not being lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - b) But the Lord reminds us that our marriages have received the blessings of the Holy Spirit.
 - * Yet, by our insensitivity to the Lord, we have not opened up our marriage to the greater blessings and power of the Holy Spirit.
 - * Ps 127:1-2.
 2. The Lord calls us to rededicate our marriages, our homes and our families to Him.

- a) He calls us to view our marriages as a service covenant with Him, so that by our marriages, God can draw more people to Himself.
 - b) This is our mission in MFC! This is the combination of our work of evangelization and our work of family renewal.
3. This weekend, open yourselves up to the power of the Holy Spirit, so that you may receive what you need for your marriage.
- a) Be humble and acknowledge where you have fallen short. Repent of these and ask the Lord to help you.
 - b) Ask much and expect much. The Lord is generous.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 2 : THE CHRISTIAN COUPLE AS A PASTORAL TEAM

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. We all have been called to serve God through our marriages.
 - a) In this task, we are not alone as individuals. And we do not simply do what we want to do.
 - b) Rather, we are a couple together. And we are supposed to work together as a pastoral team.
2. What do we mean by “pastoral”?
 - a) The word “pastoral” is derived from pastor. Pastor is another word for shepherd.
 - b) In the New Testament, Jesus used the word “shepherd” to refer to his relationship to the people he cares for.
 - * Jn 10:11-12.
 - * Jesus again used the same principle of relationship when he installed Peter as leader of his flock. Jn 21:15-17.
 - c) Thus a pastor is one who cares for the people under him. And what he gives is total care.
3. What does “team” mean?
 - a) Members have clearly stated roles and functions.
 - b) Members complement one another.
 - * They help and support each other in achieving their purpose.
 - c) They are united and cohesive.
4. The work that the pastoral team does is “pastoral work.” Such work is to take care of people as though feeding and caring for sheep.

B. Let us take a look at our role as a pastoral team over the family.

1. Why is it necessary to operate as a team.

- a) Because it is God's idea.
 - * Man needs woman and woman needs man. 1 Cor 11:11.
 - * Each one is incapable of fulfilling God's plan alone.
 - b) For the sake of unity.
 - c) Because it manifests acceptance of joint responsibility.
2. We need to undersigned that being pastors means a number of things:
- a) It connotes total care, just like a shepherd caring for the sheep.
 - * The nature of sheep is such that if no one cares for them, they easily get lost, get caught in thickets, are prey for wolves, etc.
 - b) It presumes dedication and love for the "sheep."
 - * It is not just another job. We are not just hired hands.
 - * Sometimes we can presume love (as a parent for a child), but oftentimes there is a lack of dedication and total giving.
 - * It includes the proper exercise of authority, which is a manifestation of a love relationship.
 - c) It infers priestly duties and accountability to the Chief Shepherd who is the Lord.
 - * We are priests in the family and have the task of bringing those we care for closer to God.
 - * We do not exercise our priestly duties in any old way, but recognizing that we are acting on behalf of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. We are held accountable.
 - d) It infers that the family is a domestic church.
 - * Per St. John Chrysostom, Vatican II and Familiaris Consortio.
3. As pastors over the domestic church, we need to set some essential elements in place:
- a) That Jesus is the Lord of the home.
 - * Everything in the home must clearly glorify the Lord: decorations, speech, music, entertainment, books, etc.

* Note: More in Talk 7.

b) That there is a conversion to Christian values and relationships.

* A personal conversion to Christ ought to be seen concretely in the way the family lives, and in the way members of the family relate to each other and to other people.

* Where is the place of money?
What are the priorities of the family?
How does the family use its time?
Where is it going? On the way to heaven?

c) That there is unity and order, achieved through the faithful observance of the Christian roles of men and women.

* God created man different from woman. Complementarity rather than competition is the rule. Gn 2:18.

* Man and woman have their proper roles. Eph 5:22-23. 1 Cor 11:3. This is God's governmental provision for the family.

* Man's basic role is to provide, protect and govern. The woman's basic role is that of helpmate and partner.

* Neither of them is capable of fulfilling God's purpose for the human race apart from the other.

* Note: More in Talks 3 and 4.

d) That the family is properly connected with the larger segment of the Church.

* A family cannot sustain itself without the support of other families.

* This is the importance and necessity of MFC for our Christian family lives.

C. Practical steps to take as a pastoral team.

Conversion to Jesus and acceptance of him as our personal Lord and Savior does not mean that everything automatically gets converted to the plan of God. We need to take practical steps in order for our families and homes to undergo an ongoing process of transformation.

1. Make time as husband and wife to talk.

a) Husband and wife have to share and grow in unity of heart and mind in caring for the family. This can happen through regular conjugal dialogue.

b) We recommended that you do this one-to-one on a weekly basis.

* Note: More in Talk 5.

2. Make time to be a Christian family.

a) Have daily family prayer. Go to Mass as a family.

* Bless the children.

b) Do some relational type of family recreation (if possible weekly).

c) Spend some meal times together as a family.

3. Make pastoral plans for the whole family, for each member.

a) You are often ruled by circumstances when you have no plans or directions. Usually, making such plans can simply mean knowing what the family is supposed to do to be more Christian and pursuing it.

b) In the case of each child, character formation is usually involved.

4. Pray, fast and intercede.

a) The building of a strong Christian family requires some spiritual effort. Open your homes to God's outpouring of strength and wisdom and grace.

b) Know that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Eph 6:10-13.

* Satan will oppose our efforts, because his whole dominion of society could crumble.

D. Conclusion.

1. So you are a pastoral team together. God has given you the task of building a strong family.

2. This task requires God's strength and power. Thus let us constantly invite the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us for this task.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 3 : THE ROLE OF A CHRISTIAN HUSBAND

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. We will now have 2 successive talks. The first is addressed to the men (and the women are just sitting in to listen). The next talk will be addressed to the women (with the men sitting in).
2. For us men to grow as part of the pastoral team for our family, we must understand more clearly our role as a husband. We need to understand what is our responsibility.
 - a) For many of us, our understanding of responsibility (in business, civic affairs, etc.) is one-sided, i.e., we equate it with having a position in which we have authority and we manage or direct things.
 - * Responsibility does involve the above, but there is another side, one that is often overlooked or perhaps ignored.
 - b) The other side of responsibility is accountability.
 - * Heb 13:17. “to give an account.”
 - * Thus there are two parts to responsibility: Not only do we men have God’s authority to get things done, but we will be held accountable for what we have been given to do.
3. The dictionary definition of “accountable” suggests the imminence of retribution for an unfulfilled trust or violated obligation. In other words, if we do not do what God gives us to do, then we can expect to be punished.
 - a) The parable of the talents. Mt 25:14-30.
 - b) God expects us to act, but He does not give us anything that we cannot do.
 - c) Also, God does not hold us accountable for things beyond our control (situations, people’s lives). We are accountable just to the extent that we can change things and keep things under control.

B. What does the Bible say about the husband’s role?

1. As a general principle, men are supposed to be responsible for the people of God. Men take the leadership. Women also take responsibility but in a different way.

2. What are these areas of responsibility?

a) Governance of the people as a whole.

- * 1 Tm 3:1-7. This describes the qualities of a bishop, who is a man appointed to care for the church of God.
- * Heb 13:17. The leaders to be obeyed were men.
- * Ex 3:16. The elders of the Israelites were usually older men who acted as representatives of the people.

b) Leadership in worship.

- * 1 Tm 2:8.
- * 2 Chr 5. The dedication of the temple of Solomon was led by the elders, leader of tribes, princes of ancestral homes and priests, all of whom were men.

c) Providing protection.

- * Acts 20:28-31. Paul instructs the presbyters to watch over the flock against savage wolves.
- * Jas 5:14. Presbyters pray for healing.

d) Being head of the family.

- * Eph 5:22-25.

C. Let us now focus on the last one, being head of the family. What is the husband's responsibility in this area?

1. We need to understand more the importance of the family and our responsibility to see that it is what God intends.

a) Man's typical pattern is to leave home and family to the wife, while he is responsible only for providing for the family finances.

b) But this is not in accordance with Scripture. The Bible teaches us about the father's proper role.

- * Jos 24:14. Fear and serve the Lord.
- * Eph 6:4. Raise children in the Lord.

2. Areas where the husband needs to actively lead the family.

a) Wife.

- * Make sure that her basic personal needs are met (material, physical, emotional).
- * Help her in her spiritual growth—spiritual life, prayer, also schedule (time with God, children, free time).
- * Help her maintain a proper perspective for herself, for her family and for her life in MFC.
- * Make sure of adequate communication.
- * Make sure she has sufficient and good relationships with other persons, particularly with sisters in MFC.

b) Children.

- * Take leadership and responsibility in teaching them about the Lord (Eph 6:4). Do not leave this to the Church, school or MFC.
- * Take the leadership in training your sons in manly Christian character. If not, other forces beyond your control will.
- * Take the leadership in disciplining children. Just like God. Heb 12:5-8.
- * God will hold us responsible. Story of Eli in 1 Samuel 2ff (2:12-17, 2:22-25, 3:11-13, 4:10-11,17-18). Eli tried, but not hard enough. It is not enough simply to correct, but we need to discipline with vigorous action if called for.

c) Family life and home.

- * Set the emotional tone for the home (do not leave this to the wife).
- * Oversee the family schedule (meals, prayers, entertainment, outside activities). Decide what the members of the family can or cannot do.
- * Teach and lead the family into living the covenant of MFC and its patterns of relationships.
- * Take charge of social situations (do not leave it to the wives).
- * Be the spiritual protector (intercession, spiritual warfare, blessing).

D. We can see that our responsibility is a heavy one. Since on our own we will have a very hard time, the Lord has given us various sources of support and strength for our task.

1. The Lord Himself.

a) The Lord is our ultimate source of strength. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is the source of all wisdom.

b) When we feel weary and find life burdensome, we can turn to Jesus. Mt 11:28-30.

2. Your household leader.

a) The Lord anoints his leaders. You can have this confidence.

b) Turn to your household leader, or other MFC leaders if need be, for guidance and direction. Be open and eager for input.

3. Your brothers in MFC.

a) Be faithful to your weekly household meetings, open up your life to your brothers, and receive their support and the wisdom of their collective experience.

b) Look for opportunities to be with your brothers outside of the regular MFC activities.

E. Conclusion.

1. Christian marriage and family life is a great calling for us men.

a) A husband relates to his wife as Christ to his Church.

b) A father cares for his children as a priest ministers to the people of God.

2. Let us be grateful for this great privilege, and take steps to live out fully our role as Christian husbands.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 4 : THE ROLE OF A CHRISTIAN WIFE

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. There is much confusion today regarding the role of women.
 - a) Secularists and feminists today reject the traditional understanding of the role of women.
 - b) And particularly in marriage, many people today no longer accept the traditional roles of women as wife and mother.
2. We need to study and understand God's original purpose for a woman.
 - a) Gn 2:18-24. Woman was made to be a suitable partner or a helpmate for man.
 - b) Eph 5:22-24. A wife is to be subordinate (submissive) to her husband.
 - * Of course there ought to be mutual subordination (Eph 5:21), which arises out of their being equal in worth and dignity as children of God.
 - * But as far as roles are concerned, the woman has her God-given role in marriage.
3. God's purpose in the woman's being a helpmate and subordinate is unity in marriage, that the couple will pursue one goal, one life, one vision. This is a tremendous challenge for us sisters.

B. The woman as helpmate.

1. What this brings about in our relationships within the family.
 - a) A helpmate helps form the vision for family life.
 - b) A helpmate helps carry out the vision with all her gifts, abilities and creativity.
 - c) A helpmate helps her husband carry out his work and service.
 - * Our support is a great encouragement for our husband, especially in the face of difficulties and trials.
 - * He is strengthened by the knowledge that his home front is secure.

- d) A helpmate helps raise the children and especially forms her daughters in Christian womanly character.
- e) A helpmate helps maintain a wholesome home environment by her generously serving everyone in the family.

- * The wife is often heroic in quietly going the “extra mile” for her loved ones.

2. What a helpmate is not.

- a) A helpmate is not a pastor for her husband.

- * We should not constantly watch out for and expose his faults.

- * Our husband has his own pastoral leader (his household leader in MFC) and it is not us.

- * We should patiently trust in the Lord and in the people He uses (household leader, household members, others), that He would move our husband on in his spiritual life and growth.

- b) A helpmate is not her husband’s enemy.

- * Our husband-wife relationship is not a tug-of-war. It is not a case of his way versus my way. Rather, what is the Lord’s way?

- * We are a team together. We are partners. We are on the same side, with the same vision and goals.

- c) A helpmate is not a coach.

- * Sometimes we defer to our husband’s headship, but only as a figurehead. Somehow we still manage to direct how he should discharge his responsibility as head of the family.

- * Allow your husband to truly lead, even when he commits mistakes (or what we think are mistakes). This is the only way he can truly grow to become the head of the family.

C. Living out the wife’s role effectively.

1. Spiritual life.

- a) Our own prayer life should be in order.

- b) Pray and intercede for your husband.

- * God does want him to succeed in his role. If you want this too and ask for it, God will grant it.

c) Pray for the household leader of your husband.

- * In MFC, our pastoral structure of support is such that every member has a pastoral leader over him/her. For us it is our husband. For our husbands, it is their household leader.
- * Rest assured that the husbands are discussing their role and learning more about it, and that more and more your husband will be taking responsibility for the life of your family.
- * Pray that the household leader receive wisdom and boldness to address what needs to be addressed in the lives of the men.

2. Practical life.

a) Make sure that his personal needs are cared for.

- * Clothes, food, etc.

b) See to it that the environment of your home serves him.

- * There is order. The home is clean and cozy.
- * There is peace. Do your share to keep the children well-behaved. Keep your home a place of warmth and caring.

c) Be available to him sexually and know what his needs are.

- * 1 Cor 7:3-5.
- * Sex in marriage is God's gift to us.
- * Do not use sex as a weapon, whether to get things from him or to deprive him because of some conflict.

3. In actions.

a) Express love, honor and respect.

- * Show your husband the affection and respect due to his position as head of the family.

- * Defer to his judgment even in matters where you disagree, especially if it is not a matter of crucial importance.
 - * Speak positively about him, especially with your children and the brethren in MFC. Resist the temptation to put him down when given the opportunity.
- b) Raise your children to also love, honor and respect their father.
- * Do not speak ill of him to or in front of the children.
 - * Do not contradict his directions to the children, or allow your children to go to you to counteract their father's directions.
- c) Allow your husband to lead in social and family gatherings.
4. Speech patterns.
- a) Be a source of blessing and kindness. Prov 31:26.
- b) Speak gently with love.
- * This is the true beauty of a Christian woman. 1 Pt 3:3-4.
- c) Put aside critical speech and sharp remarks.
- * We need to tame the tongue. Jas 3:8-10.

D. Conclusion.

1. With what we have been discussing, we will be considered fools in the eyes of the modern world.
 - a) But what we have discussed is God's plan. And it is God's way for us to experience the blessings of marriage and family life.
 - b) It probably will be a struggle for us, but it can happen, as we foster an environment of mutual trust, honor and respect for one another in the Lord.
2. When we follow the Lord in faith, the end result is a woman who ministers blessing and not a curse, healing instead of hurt, building up and not destruction, life and not death.
3. Let us be patient with ourselves and with others, and let us always look to and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to become holy women of God.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 5 : EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. Through the talks so far, we have been learning how to foster better marriages. But in marriage, we can expect to have difficulties and disagreements.
 - a) We need a mechanism with which to resolve such disagreements. This mechanism is communication.
 - b) But more than just a tool for problem-solving, communication is a means to express love in marriage.
2. The husband-wife relationship is a love relationship.
 - a) It is a personal, lifelong, stable commitment to love and serve one another.
 - b) It is important to express that love.
 - * Sexually, giving gifts, making a home, serving. There are many ways.
 - * One of the more important ways is communication.
3. Communication in marriage is more than just learning a skill. It is not sterile or functional.
 - a) While communication serves some basic functions (conveying facts, giving information, fostering understanding), we communicate with our spouse in order to love and serve him/her.
 - b) Communication is one concrete expression of love. It is a very important tool for building the marriage relationship.

B. Obstacles to good communication.

1. A fixed self-image or image of your spouse.
 - a) If your perception of yourself is that you are always “right” or “better” and that your spouse is always “wrong,” communication will not work.
 - b) Solution: Keep yourself open to the other’s point of view, and know that your way is not always right or better.
2. Not listening to one another.

a) Ways of doing this:

- * Being selective in listening.
- * Not spending enough effort to understand the “message” and not just the words.
- * Preparing a rebuttal before the other has finished speaking.
- * Not paying attention to what the other is saying; being disturbed while communicating.
- * For the husband, being afraid that he would always be expected to have an answer.

b) Solution: God gave you two ears and only one mouth. Listen!

3. Being resigned to the current situation.

a) He never talks; she just never stops talking.

- * Solution: No matter how bad your situation is now, in the Lord there will always be improvement. Look forward to this and work towards it.

b) We don't have anything to talk about.

- * Solution: You just lack practice. You have your whole new life in the Lord to talk about.

c) We don't seem to have the time.

- * Solution: This just means that we have assigned it a low priority. We certainly have time for many other things. Realize its importance for our life together.

4. Some differences between men and women.

a) Men need to communicate verbally less than women.

- * Men can tell the same story with much less detail and in a much shorter time.

b) Men deal more in ideas and concepts, women more in personal feelings and reactions.

c) Men tend to see the whole picture and can live with a problem, while women want it dealt with immediately.

C. Handling disagreements in marriage (or how to have a successful fight).

1. Deal with issues before they build up. If we talk freely and regularly, it will be rare to have a big problem.

2. Be objective and focus on the real issue.

- a) Avoid calling each other names.
 - b) Do not be judgmental.
 - c) Do not allow the discussion to lead you to discussing other issues and losing focus on the issue at hand.
3. Have the right motivation. Our goal is unity based on love, not on determining who is right or wrong.
 4. When bringing up a problem, do not start with an accusation.
 5. Learn to accept correction without being defensive. Do not question your spouse's basic love and commitment to you.
 6. Do not handle issues when you are angry or tired.

These are just some ways. Later you will develop more wisdom on how to handle disagreements. But what if a disagreement actually turns into a fight?

7. Both husband and wife should agree that whoever recognizes that the disagreement has taken a bad turn will immediately begin to change things but repenting for his/her responsibility in it. The other should respond in kind.
 8. Afterwards, evaluate the argument.
 - a) Discuss the dynamics.
 - * What caused each person to react wrongly?
 - * How could such reactions be avoided in the future?
 - b) Make agreements.
 - * E.g., to not be silent, not to walk out, to try and control emotions, to be eager to repent.
 9. Sometimes you have a disagreement and there seems to be no way to resolve it.
 - a) Know that you do not always have to resolve everything at once.
 - b) Make sure you part in peace. Make sure adequate reconciliation happens even though you still disagree.
- D. So we have looked at the obstacles to communication, and handling disagreements. Now what do we talk about?

1. Anything and everything, since all make up our life in the Lord. These can be: schedules, children, finances, home needs, service in MFC and parish, vacations, prayer life, problems, etc.
2. Now we have the topics, we just need to do it. Agree with each other that communication is important, prioritize it and schedule it weekly.

E. Conclusion.

1. Because we are human and are living an intense life together, we will have to deal with disagreements from time to time.
 - a) Handling these in the right way will make them less traumatic and actually turn them into something constructive.
 - b) Thus, whether our life at the moment is smooth or bumpy, our communication is designed to help build our relationship.
2. Communication, a very important element in our life together, is something we need to learn.
 - a) We should recognize its difficulties and obstacles. And we should be realistic in our expectations.
 - b) It will take time. It is not an instant formula for marital success.
3. Seek the help of brothers and sisters if you need it.
 - a) Some difficulties may need an outside perspective to get connected.
 - b) Never be discouraged. You have the love, support and prayers of your brethren.
4. Have faith in God.
 - a) The power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our marriages.
 - b) Phil 1:6.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 6 : HEALING OUR MARRIAGES

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. We have already learned a lot about Christian marriage.
 - a) God's vision for marriage (Talk 1), our role as a husband-wife team (Talk 2), our more specific roles (Talks 3 & 4), and communication (Talk 5).
 - b) We may know, understand and live out all these, but still face a major stumbling block: our hurts, both before and during our marriage.
2. We want to look now at how we can be freed from this stumbling block. God's way is healing.
 - a) It is important to know that different kinds of sicknesses require different prayers, so that we can appropriate fully the healing that God wants us to experience.
 - b) The four basic kinds of sickness and corresponding healing:
 - * Physical sickness - physical healing.
 - * Emotional sickness - inner healing.
 - * Personal sin - repentance.
 - * Demonic oppression - deliverance.

B. What is inner healing?

1. Inner healing is the healing of the inner person. By inner person we mean the intellectual, volitional and affective areas commonly referred to as mind, will and heart, but including such other areas as related to emotions, psyche, soul and spirit.
2. Why inner healing?
 - a) It is the Lord who can set us free. He can free us from all that hinder us in the Christian life: resentment, trauma, insecurities, etc.
 - b) Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8).
 - * Thus he can take the memories and hurts of the past and heal us from the wounds that still remain and which affect our present lives.

- * Jesus can fill with his love all those places in us that have been empty for so long, once they have been drained of the poison of past hurts and resentments.
 - c) Once freed of past hurts and memories, we are able to build up one another. We can move on in our marriage.
3. Remember that good health is one of the basic things that God desires for us.
- a) Good health has to do with the wholeness of man, that he has a healthy mind, body and emotions.
 - b) If we believe that God is love, then it is easy for us to believe that healing is an ordinary, not extraordinary, sign of His compassion and love.
 - c) Jesus desires to heal us.
 - * Physical healing. Mk 1:40-41.
 - * His ministry was not limited to physical healing. Jesus healed all kinds of diseases and sickness. Mt 4:23-24.
 - * Jesus also gives strength for the Christian life. Lk 22:31-32.

C. Various kinds of hurts in marriage.

1. Hurts we bring into our marriage.
- a) Some of us, by the time we get married, may have already experienced hurts or are suffering from scars of trauma or painful memories from the past.
 - * Unconsciously, we carry them into our marriage and they become obstacles to positive and open relationships.
 - * E.g., A young woman in love, born to a family whose father was openly carrying on extramarital relations with several women, had difficulty believing that she could marry a husband who would not womanize.
 - b) Sometimes we experience some fear of or alienation to some people, which we do not even understand.
 - * E.g., A man, whose mother served a lot in her parish but neglected her children, was wary of and fearful about opening up to his leaders and serving in his community.
2. Hurts during our marriage. In the marriage relationship, hurts can happen in various ways.

- a) Through deliberate acts.
 - * We may speak unkindly or carelessly and expect our partner to understand.
 - * Some enter into extramarital relations that eventually break down the family.
- b) Through insensitivity to one another's needs and expectations.
 - * E.g., The husband has a strong sense of responsibility and wants to provide for the family well. He spends a lot of his time working and earning money. In the meantime, his wife feels left out and unloved.
- c) Scars and memories of past sins or guilt.
 - * Sometimes our past sins continue to have a hold on us, such that we find it hard to even forgive ourselves.
 - * E.g., a woman who has had an abortion.
- d) Fears and insecurities, oftentimes arising because of past experiences.
 - * E.g., The wife maintains a secret bank account, because her husband in the past squandered their money. Her secret bank account has become her security.

D. How hurts can be healed.

1. Through forgiveness.

- a) The experience of Frs. Matt and Dennis Lynn in retreats and in psychiatric wards.
 - * To those who had been hurt by a loved one (e.g., left by the spouse), they asked:
 - At retreats, “When did you feel closest to God?”
 - At psychiatric wards, “When did you experience the world falling on you?”
 - * It is interesting to note that the same event that brought some to the psychiatric ward is the same event that brought others to the loving arms of God.
 - * What was the difference? It was the way the people dealt with the hurts brought about by these events—whether they were able to forgive or not.
- b) Thus, while often it is not easy, we must learn to forgive.
 - * When the hurt is deep and well-nursed, making forgiveness difficult, do not rely on your own power. Pray to Jesus for the power to forgive.

- c) Once a person is able to forgive, he experiences freedom that allows him to be peaceful and joyful.

- * When we forgive, it looks like we are doing something for the other person, who benefits from our forgiveness. In reality, we are the main beneficiary.

- 2. Through prayers for inner healing.

- a) Sometimes we experience that even after we have forgiven, we still hurt, get fearful or angry. Somehow we have not yet overcome that feeling that came with the negative experience.
 - b) Oftentimes, we need to pray for inner healing for these hurts to be dealt with.
 - c) In fact, prayers for inner healing may need to continue through a period of time.

- 3. Through counselling.

- a) This involves giving specific directions and guidance in order to help a person overcome a problem or difficulty.
 - b) This involves entering into a counselling relationship where the counselee promises to obey directions given by the counsellor.

- E. Conclusion.

- 1. And so the Lord wants to heal our marriages. Though we have hurts, these can be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. We will now have our general communal prayer for inner healing.

GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR THE PRAYERS FOR HEALING AND FORGIVENESS

After the talk on Inner Healing, the speaker leads the participants in the prayers for inner healing and forgiveness. The general procedure is as follows:

1. The participants stand. A solemn song is sung. Then the participants sit.
 2. The speaker leads the Prayer for Inner Healing.
 3. The speaker leads the Prayer for Forgiveness.
 4. The speaker gives a final exhortation.
 5. The participant-couples have a 15-minute couple dialogue.
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STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE

1. The speaker asks the participants to stand. They sing “Create in me” or “You are Near” or any other solemn song. After the song, the participants sit down.
2. The speaker instructs the participants to pray silently in their hearts with him as he reads the “General Prayer for Inner Healing.” The speaker also advises them to lift up to the Lord specific hurts that they have during the short period of silence that the group will observe immediately after the prayer. He suggests that they close their eyes.
3. The speaker reads the “General Prayer for Inner Healing” prayerfully.
4. 2 to 3 minutes of silence follow.
5. The speaker now says that they will have the prayers for forgiveness. He stresses that crucial to inner healing is genuine repentance and forgiveness between husband and wife; that the couples need to ask forgiveness and to forgive each other in order for them to have a fresh start in their relationship.
6. The speaker starts by instructing the participants to reflect on the verses from Luke 6:36-38, which he will read aloud to the group. This reading is followed by 2 to 3 minutes for reflection.
7. The speaker now asks the husbands to place their hand(s) on their wives’ shoulder(s), and to silently pray in their hearts with him while he reads the husband’s prayer.
8. The speaker reads the “Husband’s Prayer for Forgiveness,” with the attendant couple participation after the prayer.

9. The same procedure is followed for the “Wife’s Prayer for Forgiveness.” This is read by the speaker’s wife, or if she is not present, by one of the wives in the service team.
 10. After this, the speaker tells the husband and wife that they may hug and kiss each other.
 11. The speaker gives a final exhortation.
-

FINAL EXHORTATION

- A. What you have all gone through is just the start of the healing process.
- B. The hurt may or may not immediately go away. You need to continue to pray for inner healing for each other. The success of the healing process will depend to a large extent on your desire to be healed, and your cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Knowing our human limitations and weaknesses, you will continue to make mistakes and in the process hurt each other. When this happens, the offending partner needs to ask forgiveness, and the offended partner needs to expressly forgive.

A word of caution: In a conflict situation between husband and wife, each partner must ask forgiveness for any shortcoming or offense that he or she recognizes to have committed. One should not demand repentance for what is perceived to be the offense or shortcoming of the other person.

It is important to realize that the virtues of humility, generosity and patience need to be operative for the couple to experience meaningful and genuine healing in their relationship.

- D. As a concluding activity, go off to your respective rooms, or to any other secluded place, and take about 15 minutes to do the following:
 1. You can ask forgiveness from each other for more specific sins or hurts inflicted on the other (which we did not cover in the prayers). An important note of caution: There is no need to confess past sins.
 2. Pray together for inner healing.
 3. Recommit your lives to each other.

GENERAL PRAYER FOR INNER HEALING

Father, I thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who came and died on the cross to bring me salvation -- from my sins, and from the memories of past sins and hurts that prevent me from fully experiencing and trusting in Your love and friendship. I thank You that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that he wants me completely whole -- spirit, mind and body.

Lord Jesus, I invite you to walk back through every second of my life, and ask you to make me whole. Go back even to the past generations before I was born and break any harmful genetic ties, and set me free from any inherited psychological traits which could be affecting my human development. Touch my spirit to wash clean any unholiness in my family background, which could be impeding my ability to walk with you.

Jesus, you knew me even before I was born, and I thank you for being there at that moment when I was created through the physical union of my father and mother. If for any reason I was affected negatively by serious emotional, mental, physical and spiritual problems my parents might have undergone while I was in my mother's womb, I ask you to free me from those negative effects.

Thank you Lord, for being there when I was born. Heal me of any complications associated with my birth. I thank you for my mother and father who brought me into existence, and I ask you to bless them in a special way today.

Lord, walk through every second of my life. Go back and fill every void and feeling of emptiness, every lack of direction and meaning in what I was doing in my life, in my career. Touch any loneliness, during those times that I was left alone by myself when I needed most the company of others, especially at those times when I needed to resolve critical issues in my personal life. Remove feelings of fears -- fears that prevented me from doing what I needed to do, fears of rejection, fears of getting hurt again.

Jesus, there were times when I was faced with problems and difficult situations and I made mistakes and wrong decisions and in the process experienced failure, embarrassment, disappointments. I still suffer inside me whenever some of these painful memories come to mind. Lord I ask you to heal my inner self. Remove any trace of the lingering pains that accompany these memories. Grant me the grace to accept these, and my inadequacies and mistakes, and to learn from them. Let me be strengthened enough to be able to face similar trials and difficulties in peace and with confidence, knowing that you are by my side, guiding me and empowering me.

Dear Lord, I care about what others think and feel and say about me, so I ask you to heal me of any real or imagined rejection caused by my mother ... (pause a second or two), by my father ..., by my own brothers and sisters ..., by my teachers and classmates ..., by my close relatives and in-laws ..., by my friends and peers ..., by my brothers and sisters in the Lord ..., and by others whose acceptance meant a lot to me, especially my spouse and children. Remove the pain that I have suffered from the betrayal of loved ones and friends that I had trusted. Restore my confidence in people and help me to trust and love again.

Lord, remove that painful memory of the sudden death of a loved one, that I have difficulty accepting to this day. Give me the grace to accept peacefully your divine will.

Lord, grant me the grace to forgive those who wilfully hurt and treated me unkindly, and made life for me unpleasant in any way. Help me to forgive my parents who may have abandoned or

neglected me or abused and oppressed me. Help me to forgive other family members and relatives who may have fought against me, abused me, betrayed me or committed other evil things against me. Help me to forgive those from whose hands I may have suffered abuses, oppression and injustice. Remove any bitterness and resentment I have towards any of them, and heal all the hurts I have experienced. Lord, I especially pray for the grace of forgiveness for that one person who has hurt me the most; the hardest person for me to forgive; the one whom I said I would not forgive (pause a while).

Lord Jesus, I ask you to restore any broken relationships I still have with anyone. On my part, please give me the humility to accept my shortcomings and mistakes, and give me the grace to repent for the sins that I have committed. For the times that I hurt others, and failed them, and contributed to the breaking of the relationships, Lord I ask for forgiveness. Lord I ask you not only to forgive my sins but I also pray that you remove the guilt and the burden of the sins that I have carried all these years. Lord, please help me to finally forgive myself.

And finally, Lord, I ask you to heal me of any hurts and inner wounds -- even those that I am not aware or conscious of -- that were brought about by my personal wrongdoings (pause a while).

Now Lord Jesus, I thank you for walking back through life with me to heal my hurts, painful memories and fears. Thank you for the gift of forgiveness. Thank you for filling me with your love. Thank you for giving me your joy and your peace. Thank you for going way down the recesses of my mind and cleansing me. Thank you for healing my emotions, my mind, and my memories. Thank you for setting me free.

Thank you, Jesus, for mending my brokenness and for making me whole again. I cherish this new life that you have given me and this unexplainable joy and peace that I feel at this moment. Lord, help me to nourish this new being that you have given me today until the end of my days. I belong to you, and I give you all the praise and all the glory, now and forever. AMEN.

HUSBAND'S PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

Lord, I thank you for my wife. Now I realize that she truly is a gift from you.

I know that she is not perfect, in the same way that I am not perfect. She has her weaknesses and low moments in the same way that I have mine. But she also has her many good traits and qualities that make her special to me to begin with. But somehow over the years, because we have failed to realize your plan for our marriage and our role and value to one another as husband and wife, we have allowed the devil to erode the fervor of our first love for each other by falling into the temptation of focusing on each other's weaknesses and shortcomings. I thank you Lord that at this point in my life you have made me realize that I have been a source of hurt and pain to my wife despite my love for her. Knowing this, I now beg your forgiveness for what I have done that hurt her. Please heal the wounds and remove the pain that I have inflicted upon her.

Please give her the grace to forgive me. Help her to forget my past sins and give her new hope in my sincere desire to live up to her love and confidence.

(The speaker at this point asks the husbands to face their wives and to repeat after him the following prayer.)

And to you my wife, / I sincerely ask your forgiveness. / I also give you my word / that I will make a real effort / to love and honor you / from this day forward. / So help me God.

(The speaker at this point asks the wives to face their husbands and to say to them the following reply.)

WIFE'S REPLY: I love you and I forgive you.

WIFE'S PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

Lord, I thank you for my husband. I thank you for making me realize today that he is your special gift to me.

I admit that I have nurtured deep resentments against him for the many hurts that he has inflicted upon me during our marriage. I also know that I caused him pain because of what I have done or said against him. I realize now that the devil has put a veil over my eyes that made me blind to the good things that my husband is doing for me and for our family. Lord, please remove this veil and help me to see and appreciate his good qualities.

Lord, please help my husband accept my sincere desire to be a good wife to him. Help him to forgive me for the many times in the past that I had been unreasonable, uncommunicative, abusive, unloving or uncaring to him. Please remove the hurt that my past behavior may have caused him.

(The speaker at this point asks the wives to face their husbands and to repeat after her the following prayer.)

And to you my husband, / I affirm my love and commitment. / Please forgive me / my mistakes and shortcomings / and restore me/to your love and confidence.

(The speaker at this point asks the husbands to face their wives and to say to them the following reply.)

HUSBAND'S REPLY: I love you and I forgive you.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT

TALK No. 7 : BUILDING OUR HOMES FOR GOD

Expanded Outline

A. Introduction.

1. Our task as Christian couples is to build our homes for God.
 - a) We do not act as Christians simply when we are in church or together as MFC, but also when we are in the privacy of our homes.
 - b) In this talk, we will look at a vision or picture of how God wants our homes to be, and also some suggestions as to how we can go about building our homes for God.
2. What is a Christian home? What are some of its elements?
 - a) A Christian home provides the environment that allows us to raise a Christian family.
 - b) It is the center of our Christian life.
 - * In the home we have prayer, fellowship, hospitality, teaching and formation.
 - c) It is a source of stability for our family members.
 - * We have roots and a strong sense of belonging and security.
 - d) It provides the framework for patterns of our relationships in the larger community.
 - * Cooperation rather than competition.
 - * Faith rather than fear.
 - * Sharing rather than greed.
 - * Love rather than self-concern.
 - e) It is our center and base for evangelization.

B. Characteristic of a Christian home.

1. Faith.
 - a) A place where the Lord Jesus reigns.
 - * The very air proclaims his presence.
 - b) A place where prayers and Scripture form an integral part of the family pattern of life.
Dt 6:4-9.

- * Family prayers.
 - * Blessing of the children, sealing them with God's protection.
 - * Prayers for healing.
 - * Reading of Scripture.
- c) A place where the goodness of the Lord is recounted and remembered often.
- * This builds up faith and confidence in God as our loving Father.
 - * This fosters grateful hearts.
 - * Dt 8:10-18.
2. Service love.
- a) A place where each member of the family is eager to serve others—both members of our household and outsiders.
- b) The father leads, i.e., he sets directions as to what services to do or to accept. He sets the limits for service.
- c) The mother makes the home a place of hospitality.
- * Brothers and sisters are welcome.
 - * Needs are cared for.
 - * We distinguish between the Christian view of hospitality (to serve) and the world's view (to impress).
- d) Children are introduced to service as a natural part of life.
- * Let the children serve snacks.
 - * Let them welcome the guests.
 - * Do not send them away when guests come.
- e) Open your home to the Lord so that he can use it in any way he wants.
- * Realize that we are merely his caretakers.
3. Peace.

- a) A place where relationships are working well.
 - * This does not mean that there will never be relationship difficulties. But it does mean that we have matured enough in our relationships so that we know how to handle difficulties when they arise.
- b) The family pattern of life is relaxed and orderly.
 - * This frees us from the frantic pace of the world.
 - * This enables members of the family to serve the Lord in various ways.
- c) A place where God's providence and provisions are experienced.
 - * Family members are free from the anxieties and pressures of the world.

4. Order.

- a) This simply proceeds from our relationship with God, who is a God of order.
 - * In other homes there is chaos. You don't know who is coming or going, who is responsible for what, what to expect from each other.
- b) First there should be order in the roles of husband/father, wife/mother, children. Their roles should be clear, defined and lived out.
 - * The father is the protector, provider and priest.
 - * The mother makes the home a place of warmth, a place where life can happen.
 - * The children honor, respect and obey their parents.
- c) Second, there should be order in schedule, in their life together.
 - * The home is not a boarding house.
 - * There should be ample opportunities for family members to interact with one another, to enjoy each other's presence.
 - * TV and outside activities should not usurp family time. We should focus on recreation that allows interaction.
- d) Third, there should be physical order.
 - * Cleanliness.

* A system for storage.

C. How can we build our homes for God?

1. Make a decision that you will do what it takes to have a Christian home.
 - a) The father needs to take active headship in bringing this about.
2. Evaluate your home.
 - a) What elements are not God's dominion? Be honest!
 - b) Review the relationships within your family, including those who are living with you.
 - c) Review the values of your family.
 - d) Identify areas that may need change or improvement.
3. Prepare a plan for building your home for God. This includes goals, time frame, and specific things to do.
 - a) Prioritize your goals.
 - b) Husband and wife agree on the plan.
 - c) Explain the plan to the rest of the household and get their input and cooperation.
4. Have the right mind and attitude.
 - a) Be open to the leading of the Spirit.
 - b) Be obedient to God's word.
 - c) Pursue your plans with decisiveness and determination.

* But be realistic in your expectations.
5. Periodically evaluate your progress against your plan.
 - a) Be flexible and do not hesitate to change your plan if such is needed.
 - b) Repent if you have not been faithful and steadfast.

D. Conclusion.

1. We are living in a society where support structures for good Christian family life are slowly collapsing.
 - a) But there is hope. For God still is in control.
 - b) We are a people called by the Lord, a people He has set apart. Let us be proud of this and be faithful to Him.
2. Thus our task and our calling is to build a Christian home, a place where Christian culture will be truly lived to the full.
 - a) Let us build with the Lord. He is the architect and very life of every Christian home.
 - b) And every so often, let us evaluate how we are building. Let us imagine a time when Jesus in the flesh comes knocking at our door.
 - * Do we shut the door in his face and panic, because our home is far from what he wants it to be?
 - Or do we praise God and rejoice, for the one whom we have prepared our home for all these years has come!

(SG. Oct 7, 2019)