

Living a *Joy-Filled Marriage*

The *Living a Joy-filled Marriage* Program is a virtue based life-skills program that incorporates sound psychology with Catholic theology to help couples understand and set patterns of thought and behavior that ensure a joy-filled marriage.

Living a Joy-filled Marriage springs from the teaching of Blessed John Paul II's Familiaris Consortio, which calls families and couples to explore their own uniqueness by seeking their identity and mission in Christ. Each part of this course emphasizes a particular aspect of our Christian mission.

What is Unique about the *Living A Joy-Filled Marriage* Program and How Does it Work?

Building on the principles of the Theology of the Body, *Living A Joy-filled Marriage* creates a unique learning environment. During each session the program incorporates a three-stage approach that helps couples assimilate the material, discuss and personalize the principles and set plans for applying the virtue based skills.

- *Learning Stage:* First couples learn sound principles and a fresh virtue-based approach to life skills through the narrative of a presenting couple.
- *Discuss & Discover Stage:* Through a variety of focused activities, couples discuss their relationship, learn about themselves and begin applying what they have learned.
- *Plan & Build Stage:* Few couples have actually set a concrete plan for building a joy-filled marriage. Therefore, the final stage helps couples recognize topics they may need to discuss at a later date, identify joint goals and set concrete plans building and ensuring a joy-filled marriage. All of this is captured in one planning document, the M.A.P.

Virtue-Based Life Skills

The *Living a Joy-Filled Marriage* program is built on seven fundamental virtues that every aspect of marriage needs – from communication to finances, from sexuality to prayer. The virtues that permeate the program are Faith, Hope, Love, Fairness, Good Discernment, Balance, and Perseverance. In an engaging way, each session applies the virtues to the different aspects of married life.

Making It Stick

By engaging the couples in a variety of ways, we can reinforce the material and help them apply what they have learned. Therefore, throughout each session couples are given quick and effective "Check-in" activities (10 -30 seconds) to help them assimilate and personalize the concepts. These "Check-in" activities prime them for the longer activities at the end of each presentation called "Break-Out" activities. During each "Break-Out" couples have more time to reflect on, discuss and apply the material they just learned. This enables the couple to dig deeper.

M.A.P.

Finally, each couple is given a practical Marriage Action Plan (M.A.P.) whereby they capture their priorities, set concrete goals, and identify next-steps for building a joy-filled marriage. By the end of the sessions, the couples have begun a concrete "post-workshop" marriage plan!

Descriptions of Each Session

Session One: Discovering Your Marriage Mission Statement and the Role of Virtue

Session One addresses two flawed goals upon which many couples ground their marriage, and then it offers, as an alternative, a single clear goal that safeguards marriage. Session One addresses how the practice of virtue corresponds to seven fundamental longings that every person desires to have fulfilled. Finally, the session is rounded off by helping couples craft a personalized marriage mission statement that will unify them in purpose and help them in the remaining sessions.

Session Two: Communicating Love (Learning and Respecting Love styles)

Session Two explains how love is communicated in different ways and even in levels (romance, friendship, and total self-giving). Once couples understand the various aspect of love, they are poised to explore how each person experiences and expresses love uniquely. We call this their primary love style. In this session couples discover their primary love styles as individuals. They learn that different love styles are not opposing love styles and discover how to express love in ways that truly communicate love to the other. Finally, the session addresses key virtues for communicating better.

Session Three: Resolving Conflict (The Art of Loving Amidst Conflict)

Session Three offers couples simple steps to help them discern when to avoid conflict and when to bring up issues for discussion. When a couple chooses to discuss a delicate or emotionally charged topic, Session Three proposes key virtues for disagreements that foster attentive listening, maintaining a calm and open disposition, mutual respect and joint resolution.

Session Four: Building Happiness: (Managing Your Time and Money)

Session Four outlines fundamental virtues and habits in any good marriage for the healthy management of money, time and energy. This helps couples hone in on their joint priorities and then compares them against how they are actually spending their time and money. The discussions and exercises in Session Four help couples see discrepancies in their actions while opening them up to a constructive dialogue about what they want to make a priority in the relationship and what good habits they need to gain happiness that is lasting and unifying.

Session Five: Fostering Intimacy (Prayer and Sexuality)

Session Five explains how intimacy in marriage deepens friendship and trust with one another. While God has designed both prayer and the marital embrace to be intimate experiences that bring forth an abundance of love and life, a closer look shows us that both are intended to draw us closer to one another and also to God Himself. Session Five calls couples to sexual honesty. This honesty has four signs: it is a love that is free, total, faithful and fruitful. But the sexual intimacy is also meant to point us to an even greater love, namely the love of Christ. Therefore, Session Five concludes with an explanation of how prayer is simply a conversation between friends - God and you. As an apropos closure, the session invites couples to begin a life of prayer together by modeling it.