

Better Together Pre-Cana Retreat for First Time Marriages – Detailed Schedule

Time	Name of Session	Description of Segment
8:30 am – 9:00 am	Check-in, breakfast	
9:00 am – 9:10 am	Welcome, Overview, Introduction of team	MC couple will include a few words about Dynamic Catholic's Better Together program in intro.
9:10 am – 9:15 am	Opening Prayer	<p>Couples recite "Prayer for Understanding" in Couple's workbook, p. 1</p> <p>Facilitating couple does short intro on importance of prayer in marriage -our way of centering ourselves and being fully present to each other. We can think of prayer as simply a conversation with God. Prayer can be as simple as waking up in the morning and thanking God for the new day. Let's take a few moments right now to sit quietly, place ourselves in God's presence and think of one unique quality of our future spouse that we are thankful for (silent 60 second reflection).</p>
9:15-9:35 am	First large group icebreaker activity (20 minutes).	Lightning round – speed double dating – talk to four couples – 3 minutes each (one question or different questions each time), or do large group questions: What are you here?, etc.
9:35am- 10:05 am	Segment 1 - Your Dreams for Marriage	Intro to Better Together website (2-3 minutes); Facilitating couple demonstrates BT website – shows 12 sessions, etc. Mentions that BT can also be used for marriage prep sessions in the parish and as a great resource during early years of marriage.
	Intro Session – God's Dream for Your Marriage.	<p>Facilitating couple should be familiar with content of Sessions 1 and 2 of Better Together and give introductory comments such as – "We are here because we want you to have the best marriage possible – that's what God wants for you, that's what the Church wants for you, that's what we want for you."</p> <p>"God's dream is for each of us to have a healthy, holy loving marriage because our marriage is meant to be a reflection of God's love for us. God wants us to help each other to be the best version of ourselves – to be Better Together."</p> <p>Exercise 1A: Have couples take a few moments to finish the following statements and discuss some of their thoughts: My future spouse makes me a better person by.... (3 minutes)</p>
	Your Dreams for Marriage – What are your dreams	Show Video 2.0 - Wisdom from Sarah and Andy (3:31) ; facilitating couple gives brief intro on dreams for marriage – instruct engaged couples to jot down what strikes them in video . All videos will be followed by 3 minutes for couple to discuss together except when an exercise or witness talk immediately follows the video.

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		There is space in the Couple’s Workbook to jot down thoughts for each video.
	Brief exercise	Exercise 1B in Couple’s Workbook, pgs. 2-3 (10 minutes). Facilitating couple uses pp. 40-41 of Leader’s Guide to introduce Dreams Exercise.
10:05 am – 11:35 am (1 hour 30 minutes)	Segment 2 - Seven levels of intimacy	Facilitating couple gives brief intro on intimacy in marriage – different from anything else – two become one flesh – partner in all things.
		Show Video 4.0 – Wisdom from Dominick and Rebecca Pt2 (3:57) Couples write down what strikes them – take 3 minutes to discuss – Facilitating couple gives brief intro for each video, may wish to offer brief insights after each video then allow couples three minutes after each video to discuss.
		Show Video 4.1 - Cliché’s, Facts and Opinions (6:52)
		Show Video 4.2 - Hopes and Dreams (3:59)
		Show Video 4.3 - Feelings (4:06)
		Show Video 4.4 - Faults, Fears and Failures (4:42)
		Show Video 4.5 – Legitimate Needs (3:46) then have couples do Exercise 2A , Couple’s Workbook, p. 5 (7 minutes writing; 7 minutes discussing)
	Couple Witness Talk on Marital Communication – levels of intimacy (5-7 minutes)	Presenting Couple shares a few examples of the importance of intimate communication in marriage – perhaps how communicating openly with their spouse about a difficult issue helped them resolve the problem, or how their relationship went to a whole new level when they learned to share deeply and intimately (Refer to Leader’s Guide pgs. 88 – 113 or watch all six Session 4 videos to prep for talk)
	Small Group Sharing (15 minutes)	Small Group Sharing on two questions pertaining to Seven levels of intimacy . If there is no Small Group Sharing here the Marital Communication talk can cover all Seven Levels of Intimacy, peppered with examples from the presenting couple’s marriage (15 minute witness talk); or questions can be given on a powerpoint slide and each couple can pair up with one other engaged couple and discuss the questions.
		Sample Discussion Questions: 1) When we speak of marital love we often say that love is a choice; love is an act of the will; we can choose to love. What are some choices we can make to be loving and attentive to each other and be totally available to each other without distraction? 2) Share your thoughts on this statement: “Love is not based on understanding; love is based on acceptance.”

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11:35 – 12:05 PM	Segment 3 - Prayer and Spirituality	Facilitating couple gives brief intro on importance of prayer in marriage. Prayer is foundational to a spiritual life and essential for Christian marriage.
		Show Video 6.0 (1:53) . Facilitating couple follows up with brief witness about prayer as a resource for couples to call upon. At any time of day we can ask for God’s help or pray for our spouse (allow about 3 minutes)
		Show Video 6.2 - World Class Help (4:19)
	Couple Witness Talk on Prayer and Spirituality (5-7 minutes)	Facilitating couple follows video with a 5-7 minute personal witness on prayer and spirituality – importance of God in their marriage and how they practice their faith (use pp. 158-159 in Leader’s Guide as guide for this segment.
		Facilitating Couple describes Exercises 3A and 3B in Couple’s Workbook on pgs. 5-10. Have couples open to the pages and briefly go over this take-home exercise with them and instruct them to talk over with a married couple they admire (or mentor couple) and their priest or deacon.
	Mealtime Prayer Ritual (7 minutes) (during lunch can play songs each team couple danced to at wedding)	Facilitating Couple introduces ritual by discussing importance of prayer rituals at home – making meals special and important (the family meal) – Importance of prayer – praying as a family (See Appendix A at bottom of this document on Table Blessings and Domestic Church). Couple shares some actual family prayer practices they use at home. The goal here is to model a form of prayer for the engaged couples. Couple reads short scripture passage then offers a prayer of thanks for the food.
	Suggested Scripture Passage – 2 Corinthians 4: 15-18	“Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God. Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.” Facilitating couple can mention that this passage helps us deal with such crises as Covid-19 – gives us hope.
12:05 noon – 12:50 pm	Lunch	

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12:50 pm – 1:05 pm	Post Lunchtime activity	Agree/Disagree or Nearly wed game
1:05 pm – 2:05 pm	Segment 4 - Conflict is Inevitable	Facilitating couple gives brief intro to conflict resolution segment; instruct couples to jot down what strikes them in the video and discuss.
		Show Video 5.2 - Common Purpose (3:31) ; Couples discuss for 3 minutes
		Show Video 5.4 - Keys to Healthy Conflict (4:49)
	Couple Witness Talk (5-7 minutes)	Facilitating couple gives brief reflection on importance of good conflict resolution skills – give an example or two from their own marriage.
		Couples do Exercise 4A in Couple’s Workbook, pgs. 11-12 (allow about 15 minutes – 7 minutes to write; 7 minutes to discuss).
	Conflict Resolution Small Group discussion (15 minutes)	Small group discussion on conflict resolution questions. If no small group discussion is done here, can extend witness talk on Conflict Resolution or have each couple pair up with another couple to discuss questions.
		Sample Small Group Discussion Questions: 1) Why is it so important to handle conflict well in a marriage? 2) How important is humor in your relationship and how can humor contribute to healthy conflict resolution?
2:05 pm – 2:35 pm	Segment 5 - Sexuality	Facilitating couple gives brief intro into sexuality as a gift as God intends (use “Additional Resources” section in Leader’s Guide pp. 205-207)
		Show Video 7.1 – How to Have a Great Sex Life (4:01)
	Couple Witness talk	Facilitating couple gives brief witness on each of five things needed for a great sex life, pp. 187-188 of Leader’s Guide (5-7 minutes).
		Exercise 5A in Couple’s Workbook pgs.13-15 (7 minutes to write; 7 minutes to discuss)
2:35 – 3:20 pm	Segment 6 - Family NFP Segment	Facilitating couple gives brief intro to video (Couple to Couple league video on home page of CCL website – 3:28; video is on bottom of home page and is called “Live the Love...Discover Natural Family Planning” – also available at this Youtube link
		After video facilitating couple talks about value of taking the classes then shows classes listed on Engaged Couple’s Resource Card; strongly suggest couples take an NFP class.
	NFP Brief Witness Talk	If an NFP couple is available they should give a 5-7 witness talk on their own experience of using NFP in marriage. Should include brief intro to Family Dream video.
	Family Segment	Video 8.2 – Your Family Dream (3:40)
	Option: Can replace couple exercise on family with a talk on	Exercise 6A in Couple’s Workbook, pgs. 15-16. Facilitating couple leads exercise – Gives brief examples of what they knew they wanted in their family and what

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	money and budget (finance talk) and make Exercise 6A a take-home assignment.	they did not want (about 3-5 minutes); give couples 7 minutes to write; 7 minutes to discuss.
3:20 pm – 4:00 pm	Final Segment – On the Day	Video 12.5 – The Difference between a wedding and a marriage (3:17) ; Facilitating couples gives brief intro to video and shares one story about their wedding day (about 3 minutes)
10 minutes	Love Letter segment	Facilitating Couple gives instructions for Love Letter Exercise on pgs. 16-17 in Couple’s Workbook (we suggest using the workbook for love letter to encourage couples to keep their workbooks). Soft meditative music should be playing in the background while couples are writing their letter.
10 minutes	Final Prayer Ritual	Selecting the Readings from your wedding – facilitating couple selects one of the readings from their wedding and reflects on what this reading has meant at times in their marriage – this is a prayerful reflection around scripture – engaged couples are invited to keep their readings in a special place or have them printed out to hang in home. Facilitating couple may create a framed reading as an example.
	All recite final prayer	Final prayer on pg. 18 in Couple’s Workbook
	Evaluations and distribution of certificates	Team couples give out the gift bags with holy water fonts and describes how the font can be used in the home to bless one another. Team couples all sign a congratulatory greeting card for each couple with their phone numbers and email addresses (card is in gift bag)

Appendix A - Domestic Church – Prayer before Meals

There are hundreds of rituals that we perform every day in our homes. Whether we realize it or not, we are creatures of habit. We all have rhythms, routines, and rituals that make up our daily lives. Most of us wake up in the morning, drink a cup of coffee, and brush our teeth. Or maybe we start the day off with a simple prayer and Bible reading. Routines and rituals are not a bad thing. They keep us on track and remind us of what matters most. In a spiritual sense, I believe that we need to have rhythms and routines to grow in our daily walk with Christ.

The truth is, your home is a domestic church, which is a term the early church used to describe the connection between the church and the family and our daily rituals. The home can be a place of Christian worship, learning, and discipleship when we bring the components of a worship service, which include reading the Bible, praying, and singing, into our homes through family liturgy.

The ordinary places that we inhabit most such as the family table, the living room, or even the car can become places of prayer and worship. Through simple daily activities like sharing meals with one another, our homes become sacred places of hospitality and thanksgiving as we gather together to

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break bread, share stories, and give thanks. How beautiful would it be if we offered up the ordinary times of the day and the spaces of our homes for the glory of God.

As you begin, we encourage you to make time and set aside places for prayer in your routine. Search for moments throughout the day that fit into your family rhythms. Consistency is key, as it will become part of your day that your family will look forward to. Make space in your home for prayer. Gather around the table, share a meal, and make time for each other. Whether it be around the dinner table, in the living room, or in your children's rooms at bedtime, may your home become a house of prayer.

Table Blessings

So much of life happens when sharing a common meal around our dinner tables. Most of us eat three meals a day. That's about 1,095 meals each person has over the span of a year. Wow, that's a lot of meals! Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to find that the Bible places a table at the center of the spiritual lives of God's people.

In the Old Testament we see the table of Passover; in the New Testament we find the table of Communion. Jesus Christ often used the context of sharing a meal to minister to people and to teach others important lessons about the kingdom of God. The Gospels show us that Jesus loved meals. In the book of Luke alone, there are ten stories of Jesus dining with various people. Each Gospel ends with Jesus breaking bread and sharing the Last Supper with His disciples (see Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39; and John 13:1–17:26). Luke even records Jesus making a meal for His disciples after His resurrection (see Luke 24:42–43).

Table blessings find their origin in the ancient Jewish practice of saying a blessing before the beginning of a meal. The practice reminds us that we should give thanks to God who is the giver of everything. Often called "saying grace," it is customary for Christians to say a short prayer or thankful phrase before or after a meal. Throughout the centuries, Christians have continued the practice of blessing their meals at dinner tables around the world. Table blessings help bring families, friends, and communities together in gratitude and thanksgiving to God, thus making a profound connection with God and one another.

Gift Bags

https://www.amazon.com/Olive-Christian-Cross-Handcrafted-Bethlehem/dp/B0778RSJ6Y/ref=sr_1_5?dchild=1&keywords=rustic%2Bmarriage%2Bcross&qid=1587753493&sr=8-5&th=1

<https://www.wayfair.com/decor-pillows/pdp/umbra-hangit-picture-frame-umb3268.html?piid=37866735>