

Post Encounter Resources - Flame Presentations
Contents

July 11, 1995

Dear Lovers,

We are proud, finally, to provide to United Methodist Encounter this electronic library containing a substantial library of excellent flame presentation material. Flames should feel free to use this information, print it and copy it as desired for Marriage Encounter Flame use and other Encounter use.

This library should be considered a living, growing entity. But it will only grow as new material is provided. Please submit materials, especially Flame Presentations or presentation outlines which have been a part of your Flame activities so that other Flames can be encouraged and strengthened. This library will be updated and redistributed whenever there is sufficient new material to warrant it.

In the very new future, similar libraries will be generated for Love Circles and for Dialog Workshops. If you have any resource materials which would benefit these libraries, please send them to us for the benefit of MEUM couples and Flames everywhere.

This disk was generated in Word for Windows but it is formatted as RTF (Rich Text Format) meaning it is Text format including document format information. It should be readable by most of the popular modern personal word processing software. If you have any trouble accessing this library in a readable form and need a different format, please call us.

Please use this library for the benefit of couples and Flames. We have put a great deal of time into compiling this resource and need only its use to make it a Joy.

Steve and Rita Sowers

National Resource Couple
Encounter, United Methodist
305 Sunblest Blvd. South
Fishers, IN. 46038
(317) 842-0924

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CONTENTS

Page	Title
1.	Introduction to Flame
2.	How to Host an Information Night
3.	Flames
10.	Reliving the Weekend Dialogue Questions
13.	Will You Do It?
15.	A Cornerstone to Relationship - Self
17.	Encounter with Self
18.	Keeping Each Other Number One
19.	Trust
20.	Our Vocation, to Love One Another
21.	Experiencing Daily Awareness of Us
22.	Living Our Coupleness
24.	To See Ourselves More Clearly (compliments)
25.	Did You Know Your Attitude is Showing?
27.	Pride and Humility
28.	Priorities: Yours, Mine and Ours
30.	How Other Marriages Influence Ours
31.	Signs of Love
32.	Openness to Receiving
34.	Unity - Marriage in God's Plan
36.	Leisure
38.	Seeing Our Goodness
39.	A Key to Living Dialogue
40.	The Secret of Staying in Love
41.	Confidence In Our Dialogue
43.	The Art and Joy of Listening
44.	Listening
46.	Romance is Not a Cure-All
48.	Our Sexual Relationship and Me
50.	Sex as a Tool for Communication
51.	Communicating Sexuality in our Home
53.	Forgiveness and Reconciliation
54.	Forgiveness – What Is It?
55.	The Lost Son: Forgiveness & Reconciliation
56.	Trust - The Key to Married Life
57.	Gift of Healing
58.	Sacrifice
59.	How Come We Don't Talk About Death?
61.	Our Coupleness - Our Gift to the Church
62.	Treating God Like I Treat You.
64.	Wherever You Go, I Will Go
65.	The Competitive Christian
67.	Follow Me
69.	Warm Fuzzys

Post Encounter Resources - Flame Presentations
Contents

- 73. Remember When
- 74. 365 Times
- 75. Please Hear What I'm Not Saying
- 77. Open House
- 78. Renewing Our Dreams Through Change
- 79. Open and Caring
- 80. Love Letter
- 81. Marriage in God's Plan Through Coupleness
- 82. Change Thru Love
- 83. We Are Special
- 84. Let's Stop Playing Games
- 88. Sharing Our Feelings About Possessions
- 89. Finances
- 91. Being Honest With Our Feelings
- 92. Focus on Feelings
- 93. Let's Celebrate
- 94. Hooked on Feelings
- 96. I'm OK, You're OK
- 97. Recruiting is a Way of Life
- 99. Approaching Meaningful Dialogue
- 101. How The Dialogue Process Helps Us Live Out Our Daily Lives
- 103. Toward A Deeper Relationship
- 104. How to Describe a Feeling
- 107. Living Out Our Love
- 110. Discovering Feelings and Needs in Dialogue
- 112. Experiencing Our Confidence in Dialogue
- 113. Memories
- 114. Aldonza
- 115. Dealing With Death as a Couple
- 117. To Love is A Decision
- 118. To Love is A Decision - by Fr. Chuck Gallagher
- 122. If God Should Speak
- 125. Apples
- 126. The Rose
- 128. Why Don't You Grow Up!
- 129. Christ is Risen For Us Today! An Easter Presentation
- 131. A Child Is Born For Us Today, Alleluia! An Advent Presentation
- 132. But We Haven't Missed Love!
- 134. Close Encounters of the Kid Kind
- 138. I Corinthians 13 for Couples
- 140. Our Sex - Routine or Refreshing
- 142. Our Children's Self Image - How Do We Affect It?
- 144. Couple Dynamics -- Toleration or Change
- 145. Community Night Outline- Dialogue Workshop
- 150. Mission, Vision, Values

Post Encounter Resources - Flame Presentations
Contents

152.	Forms of Behavior in Regards to Financial Responsibility
153.	Do You Love Me?
154.	Hints For Those Who Are Running After Self-Worth
155.	Feelings, The Vital Signs of our Relationship
156.	Romance, Adventure, Daring Rescues, Undercover Work
160.	Toward a Deeper Relationship
162.	Scripture Dialogue
166.	Family Dialogue
170.	Dialogue Series on Sex
171.	Dialogue Series on Death
172.	Priorities of Marriage
175.	The Birds in our Lives
180.	A Weekend of Music
182.	Dealing with Differences
186.	Our God is an Awesome God
192.	Unconditional Love
197.	Respect
202.	Be Kind to One Another
203.	A Marriage Prayer
204.	Respectfully Disagreeing
205.	Balancing Goals
208.	Spirituality in Our Marriage Means Cherishing Each Other
210.	A Different Kind of Bird
214.	Risks
215.	Anniversary Song, a Poem
216.	Encounter, a Poem

INTRODUCTION TO FLAME

We encourage the use of this presentation when Rookie couples are present or when discipline has become a matter of concern.

1. We'd like to take a few minutes to recall what a Flame is. It is a place and a time for us to strengthen and share our commitment to each other through the daily use of 10/10. The word Flame is to remind us that we want to keep the flame of our marriage alive and healthy.
2. A Flame takes as it's topic a part of one of the talks from the weekend. Meeting on a monthly basis, we progress through the topics in the same order that they are presented on the weekend. So, each year we are able to review, in part, an entire weekend. The format of a Flame is:
 - a. Opening Prayer
 - b. The Presentation
 - c. The 10/10 question and dialogue.
 - d. Open Sharing - The sharing may be either a sharing from the private dialogue or a separate sharing question.
 - e. A brief business meeting, including determining the next host and presentation couples.
 - f. Prayer and Sing-Off
 - g. Time for socializing.
3. We'd like to say a few words also about the discipline of sharing. When we share, we share who we are as an individual and as part of a marriage relationship. Specifically, we share our attitudes and our feelings that were stimulated by the sharing question and by the presentation. We ask that you please write the sharing question in your notebooks as it is given. Refer to the question before you share. It is important to remember that we do not share attitudes and feelings about our spouse unless we have already shared those specific attitudes and feelings with our spouse. What we do share is our attitudes and feelings about our self and those attitudes and feelings about our spouse which we have already shared with our spouse. What we are doing, then, is sharing from our relationship, our attitudes and feelings about the question.

Sharing is not a discussion and is not meant to solicit a response or initiate a debate. We do not share to get a point across. We share to share that part of ourselves that makes us unique. My sharing might stimulate feelings or attitudes in you which you wish to share. That's OK because that's not a response that I solicited from you.

All sharing of this group, and of any Marriage Encounter Group, are confidential within the group.

HOW TO HOST AN INFORMATION NIGHT

An Information Night is a meeting hosted by encountered couples for unencountered couples to encourage them to make a Marriage Encounter Weekend. Every couple is encouraged to invite other couples to an information meeting. There are several ways to do this. You may be able to invite your couples to a meeting that is already scheduled by community or you may host your own.

First the time and place must be determined. It can be in your home or in the church. It might even be held in a Sunday School class. Couples are invited with written or verbal invitations.

The format for the meeting can follow several plans.

1. A skit presented by three couples can be used. The skit is read and contains humor. It shares most of the information that couples need to know about Marriage Encounter weekends. After the skit a little more information is shared with time for questions.
2. There are videos available that also share the information about the weekend. The video can be shown and followed by a time for questions.

After the information is shared, light refreshments are usually served. Registration blanks are handed out and couples are encouraged to decide of a date and complete.

Copies of the skit and the video are available. Contact a presenting couple for these materials. You may also ask a team couple who lives near you to help with an information night. A Flame group nearby may also assist you.

A lasagna or spaghetti dinner can also be used as an information meeting. Couples are invited to the dinner and seated at individual tables to be served. There are questions on the table for their discussion during the meal. Following dessert, the skit or video is presented and the couples are given the chance to register for a weekend.

Think, what couple do you love most in this world? Who deserves the encounter most? Invite them to an information night, invite them to a weekend! To quote Father Chuck Gallagher who began M.E. in the U.S., "Every day throughout our church, there are couples becoming ineligible because their marriages are no longer good enough to go. Fill your heart with a desire for those whom the Lord is calling to our weekend." Share Marriage Encounter with those you love.

FLAMES

FLAME DESCRIPTION

- A. Consists of 3 to 8 couples who meet on a specific night, either monthly, or bimonthly. These couples make a commitment to the group and its meeting night.
- B. The group supports ME weekend activities by writing letters for the newsletter, attending sing-offs and renewals, babysitting, being prayer couples, hosting, recruiting and participating in other events which contribute to the growth of Marriage Encounter.
- C. The Flame is a vital link in the communications network. The Flame coordinator will pass on information necessary to the continuation of ME and will also report items of importance to their district coordinators.
- D. Members of Flame are committed to dialogue, coupleness and ME.
- E. The focus of the group is the 10/10 and sharing which takes place each meeting. The sharing is confidential and nothing shared in the Flame is ever mentioned elsewhere.

FLAMES GOALS AND PURPOSE

- A. Each couple strives to lend support to each other and to each couple's dialogue.
- B. There should be a development of caring and concern for others in the group.
- C. Development of the trust level among members of the group.
- D. Acceptance of couples where they are. This would mean listening to the sharing of others and learning rather than trying to make couples into what you want them to be.

SUGGESTED FLAME FORMAT

- A. The host couple should confirm arrangements, especially with the presentation couple, then notify couples 5-7 days before the date of the next meeting. Remind them where the meeting will be and be sure they have directions. etc.
- B. The group should have a definite starting and ending time. Couples appreciate knowing they will be home when they have promised their baby-sitters. A suggestion is 7:30 to 10:00.
- C. Opening Prayer
- D. The presentation.
- E. The 10/10 question and dialogue.
- F. Open Sharing - The sharing may be either a sharing from the private dialogue or a separate sharing question.
- G. A brief business meeting, including determining the next host and presentation couples.
- H. Prayer and Sing-off.
- I. Refreshments

INFORMATION SHEET FOR FLAME COUPLES

THE RULES: Sharing is voluntary, privacy is guaranteed, focus on the question. Couples are accepted where they are, only a thank-you when couples share or pass, don't worry about duplication of sharing.

OPENING FELLOWSHIP: Keep it short and start the evening on time, even if some couples have to be late. Flames are not a social event and couples come for nourishment of their dialogue, not their stomach. Do not discuss activities or events that exclude some couples from participating.

OPENING PRAYER: Make it clear, especially to new couples, that just listening to God is prayer, just as much as sharing yourself. No one is required to add to prayer or kept from adding.

PRESENTATION: Do take your turn in preparing and giving the presentations. You will grow even more than those who listen to others' presentations. The purpose is for you and your spouse to have a meaningful dialogue.

DIALOGUE: Observe the discipline of silence during the writing period. Try not to interfere with the dialogue of others, especially when you are finished and they may still be deeply into their own.

SHARING: Remember to listen deeply to the sharing by others. To turn off the competitive urge and the urge to heal that often arises. It is important in sharing not to interrupt, react, comment or, nor react to anyone else's sharing. It is not a time to teach, to judge or even to help. Someone may really struggle to say what is in their heart. Be kind enough not to stifle them with loving interruptions, or joking comments. Their struggles to share are as much a gift to the community as the excitement, exhilaration and joy they also share. The sharing by others can help us to recognize our own feelings and attitudes --if we listen deeply -- and not be preparing our own sharing! Sharing is a gift of ourselves and a decision to love, with confidence in those who love and care about us and want us to grow. It is a time to speak from the heart and to from the heart.

CLOSING PRAYER AND SING OFF: The hosting couple may start the prayer or ask someone to please do so. End with the Lord's Prayer in unison. Then enjoy "There's a New World Somewhere."

FLAMES

PURPOSE OF THE FLAME

The purpose of the Flame is to build a community of dialoguing couples by sharing where we are in our dialogue. It is the same as saying where we are as a couple- Just as we share who we are as a person in our daily dialogue with our spouse, in the Flame we expand this to sharing who we are as a couple with the other couples. Since dialogue is such a dynamic, changing, up and down event, we are never the same as a couple from month to month any more than we are the same as a person from day to day. Each dialoguing couples who comes to a Flame is a presentation if they share who they are as a couple.

Since each couple is unique, all will profit whether the relationship has been good or has encountered difficult times in dialogue as well as our successes. We need to hear from the couples who have or are having difficulty in their dialogue in order to remind us that this is a real part of dialogue. In fact, this is the only way that our Flames can be real! As we share our successes, we are made aware of what our dialogue and relationship can be.

ACCEPTING EACH COUPLE FOR WHERE THEY ARE.

Because each person is unique, each couple is unique. We feel differently and experience differently. We are each at a different level with respect to dialogue, our relationship, sharing, reaching out, openness, and total belonging. Therefore, the same principle of accepting your spouse's feelings and not rejecting them applies to accepting each couple for where they are. Sometimes we are able to take on a feeling all the way to unity; at other times, we may only be able to tolerate it. The conclusion from this is that there is no set or fixed level at which a couple should be. Every couple, no matter how long they have been dialoguing, will have their ups and downs. No matter how deeply committed to dialogue a couple is, they will still have good dialogues, some not-so-good dialogues and some outright poor dialogues. Where a couple may be at any given moment in their dialogue is like a feeling - neither good nor bad, but just as it is!

For this reason, there is no place in Flames for observing, comparing, judging, or analyzing, where a couple We come to share who we are with the confidence that the other couples will accept us and allow us to be who we are at that moment. This is the beauty of the Flame - it allows us to be authentically ourselves as a couple.

WHEN FLAMES ARE HELD:

It is planned to have either one or two Flame meetings a month, whatever day the group decides.

EXPLAINING THE THREE COMMITMENTS

These are guidelines on how to present these commitments to new Flame members. Please read them to yourself, then state them in your own words.

COMMITMENT TO DIALOGUE: The key is to keep the emphasis on what dialogue means to us. We talk about the new insights we receive in ourselves and in our coupleness. We explain the steps we've taken to really work at this technique. We say that if we miss dialoguing, we won't sit back and wring our hands. Commitment to dialogue is a commitment to the present and to the future. We tell them that 10 and 10 is a tool -- the very best too we've found to really keep our communication great. As with any new tool, we must keep working at it to be really good at using it. We talk, about how neat dialogue is in our life, how boring it occasionally can be and all our struggles or frustrations with it, but avoid the judgment-type statements, such as "if you don't dialogue, then..."

COMMITMENT TO FLAME: We explain what Flame can mean to us. We talk about the honesty and openness that we try to give in the group and that we receive from the other couples. We point out the real trust that we are forming in our group. We mention that we don't just bring our "best faces" but that we bring our total selves, our whole relationship--our strengths and our weaknesses. We talk about the uplifted feeling and the strength that we derive from our Flame meetings. We mention how unique each couple is--how totally irreplaceable they are. We especially point out how each couple is needed in the group, how really missed they are if they for some reason cannot be at the meeting. We ask them to consider what night is best for them to meet so that they will have no conflicts. We mention that they'll be asked to try Flame three times before committing themselves to it. Again, avoid saying judgmental things such as "if you don't join, we are going..."

COMMITMENT TO RENEWAL OF OUR OWN CHURCH: We ask each couple to renew their own church, to search themselves to find what this means to them. One way to renew our own church is to renew our own relationship. As we begin to live as witnesses to the power of loving relationships in the world, we begin to live our renewal of the church.

FLAME COORDINATORS RESPONSIBILITIES

Webster defines "to coordinate" (v) as "to bring into proper order or relation; harmonize; adjust." The job of sharing community coordinator contains no "power" or "authority."

Our main business as Flame Coordinator is to create harmonious relations, see that all runs smoothly, and to facilitate deeper sharing. We are there to distribute the news and to seek answers to any questions the couples have. We have simply been in this a little longer than some of them and are here to support them in their beginnings. They are where they are and we are where we are. There are no levels involved. Also, it is important to realize that support is a reciprocal relationship. In being able to help and support, we are supported in return and our own relationships are strengthened. We are receiving from the community members as much strength and support as we are giving.

- A. Set an example for deeper sharing by giving totally and freely of yourselves in your letters to each other and in your sharing with your community. Community members must trust you before they can share themselves with you. To do this, it is important that they can see and sense that you trust them with your deepest gut-level feelings.
- B. Attend all meetings. It's more important to establish a regular, dependable pattern than to try to rotate the schedule to accommodate everyone with different days.
- C. Set the date and place for the upcoming meetings and presenting couples. Be sure the hosting couple has contacted members before the meeting.
- D. Contact any members that missed Flame to let them know that they missed any important business, and where the next meeting will be.
- E. Pass along all information from and to the Regional Coordinator.
- F. Encourage attendance at community. Stress the importance of each couple to the group, our stake in each other and the effect on the trust level when any couple misses.
- G. Support ME by attending Sing-Offs, Renewals, information nights etc.
- H. Request articles and letters for Enjoy, as well as submitting them yourself.
- I. Attend meetings to build relationships and to keep informed of current news.
- J. Keep a current roster of community members.
- K. Keep a record of all couples prayed for by your community- Know what has happened to them or where they are concerning community.

FLAME COORDINATORS RESPONSIBILITIES (cont'd)

- L. Keep in touch with couples who do not join community.
- M. Assign prayer couples when you are contacted with the names of couples making a weekend. Make sure the prayer couple has a copy of the guidelines and knows what is expected of them.
- N. Write support letters to couples who will be coming into your Flame. Encourage other community couples to write them also. They will be given to the rookie couple in the care package after the weekend.
- O. After the weekend, make sure the prayer couple has talked with their couple before the Rookie Renewal. Otherwise do it yourself. Encourage the Prayer Couple to keep in close contact with the Rookie Couple.
- P. Couples who are not dialoguing should be given every help and encouragement from all the community members. If a couple isn't dialoguing, try to help them by giving them questions, keep reaching out to them.
- Q. Each couple decides for themselves if they want to be committed. Sometimes if they decide "no", they are afraid to tell anyone for fear they'll hear or be rejected. Sometimes they are relieved if they are asked where they are with dialogue and community.
- R. Periodically look at yourselves as coordinators. What attitudes are you setting up for your sharing community? Are you projecting that business is more important than sharing? Are you projecting that the group "belongs" to you or that you are only a small part of the total sharing community.

RELIVING THE WEEKEND DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

WELCOME, INTRODUCTION AND FEELINGS

We began Friday Night by welcoming the couples and introducing ourselves. This was followed by an introduction to the sharing of feelings. It was the beginning for some of us to explore what feelings are, that they are an expression of WHO WE ARE.

1. HDIF knowing my feelings are who I am?
2. HDIF knowing your feelings are who you are?
3. What methods do I find (colors, nature, scenes, mutual experiences etc.) easiest to use in describing my feelings and HDIFAT?
4. What methods do I find most difficult to use in describing my feelings, and HDIFAT?
5. HDIF when you describe a feeling to me in a way I can't relate to?
6. HDIF when I'm trying to describe a feeling of mine to you?

ENCOUNTER WITH SELF

This was the first presentation given on Saturday morning; there was no exchange of notebooks. This was a chance to look at myself in all honesty.

1. How does the image I project affect our relationship? HDIFAT?
2. What do I want to change about myself that I think would please you, and HDIFAT?
3. What has our dialogue done for my self-image and HDIFAT?
4. What quality in you am I most dependent on, and HDIFAT?
5. HDIF when I judge myself inadequate, guilty and unloved?
6. What are my thoughts, when I hear the statement "God does not make junk," and HDIFAT?

MARRIAGE IN TODAY'S WORLD

This was the second talk Saturday morning and it dealt with our living out of the world's plan for our marriage, which is married singles.

1. How are we living as married singles, and HDIFAT?
2. HDIF when I realize I'm not what you thought me to be?
3. HDIF when I realize you're not all I thought you were?
4. What are my thoughts about Love Is a Decision, and HDIFAT?
5. What are the most difficult things for me when I write you a love letter and HDIFAT?

LISTENING

In this presentation, the Minister set a scene from Scripture, and we became aware of the importance of listening in our relationship.

1. HDIF when really listen me?
2. How can I be more open to listening to you, and HDIFAT?
3. HDIF when I don't listen to you?
4. What is the condition of the soil of my heart in listening to you and HDIFAT?
5. What do I think about the statement, "Being open to you is being open to God," and HDIFAT?
6. In what area do I find it most difficult to listen to you and HDIFAT?

RELIVING THE WEEKEND DIALOGUE QUESTIONS (cont'd)

AREAS FOR REACHING OUT TO EACH OTHER

This presentation, given after lunch Saturday, gave us the opportunity to share our feelings in areas (Sex, Death, Finances) seldom touched in our relationship.

1. HDIF when I quarrel or judge or reject your feelings?
2. HDIF when I think you have quarreled, judged, or rejected my feelings?
3. What are my thoughts when we decide to dialogue on sex?
4. What do I like least and most about our sexual relations, and HDIFAT?
5. What are my thoughts when we decide to dialogue on Death, and HDIFAT?
6. What are my thoughts when I think of you dying, and HDIFAT?

GOD'S DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE

In this presentation, we learned that God has a plan for our marriage which is to live in close loving relationship.

1. What do I think about living God's plan for our marriage, and HDIFAT?
2. Am I satisfied with our relationship, and HDIFAT?
3. HDIF when I'm holding you close to me?
4. How are we growing closer as a couple, and HDIFAT?
5. HDIF when we are close during and after dialogue?
6. How does our individuality strengthen us as a couple, and HDIFAT?

RISKING TO TRUST IN DIALOGUE

Following dinner Saturday night, we were given the opportunity to make the decision to trust our spouse with a feeling that was difficult to share.

1. HDIF when I consciously make the decision to trust you with my feelings?
2. HDIF when I don't trust you?
3. What feelings have I kept hidden from you lately, and HDIFAT?
4. HDIF when I'm able to express my physical needs in our lovemaking?
5. HDIF when I'm not able to express my physical needs in our love making?
6. HDIF when I'm under pressure?

IMPACT OF DIALOGUE IN OUR DAILY LIVES

This was the last presentation on Saturday night, when we discovered that daily dialogue was a means of building on to the good marriage we have.

1. What are my thoughts about daily dialogue, and HDIFAT?
2. What do I think our dialogue did for us on our weekend, and HDIFAT?
3. HDIF when I think you are looking forward to our dialogue?
4. What do I think about the difficulties of our daily dialogue? HDIFAT?
5. HDIF after we dialogue?
6. How do I see our dialogue has changed our relationship, and HDIFAT?

RELIVING THE WEEKEND DIALOGUE QUESTIONS (cont'd)

MARRIAGE AS COVENANT

This presentation preceded our beautiful 70/70 and brought alive the awareness of living out our Covenant of Matrimony.

1. What is my fondest memory of our wedding day and HDIFAT?
2. HDIF when I think about us marrying one another each day?
3. What do I think about our Covenant of Matrimony, and HDIFAT?
4. HDIF when I ask for your forgiveness?
5. What are my thoughts about having the power to heal one another and HDIFAT?
6. What is my fondest memory of our 90/90 and HDIFAT?

LIVING OUR COVENANT

This is the final presentation of the weekend and took place after lunch on Sunday. It actually consisted of several different sections in which the presenting couples swapped out for each one.

Being Open And Apostolic

During this section we began to see how we could share our love with others, and by living out God's plan for our marriage WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

1. What are my thoughts about us being unique as a couple, HDIFAT?
2. How do I see our strength as a couple and HDIFAT?
3. HDIF when our couple love is affecting our family and friends?
4. HDIF when I hear, "Love isn't love until you give it away"?
5. HDIF when we are with an encountered couple or couples?
6. HDIF when I hear Jesus' words, "love one another, as I have loved you"?

Keeping Our Relationship A Priority

This section gave us a view of how we could live our lives as a dialoguing couple, and the difficulties we may have, keeping us as number one in our lives.

1. How has our daily dialogue helped me to keep you number one in my life? HDIFAT?
2. HDIF when I want to skip a dialogue?
3. What do I think about our spiritual growth as a couple, and HDIFAT?
4. What do I think of Jesus as a person and HDIFAT?
5. What are my thoughts when we pray together, and HDIFAT?
6. What do I think about building relationships with other dialoguing couples and ministers, and HDIFAT?

Our Dream To Change The World

This was the last section given on the weekend, and it showed us how to spread the gift of dialogue to couples we care about.

1. HDIF when we see the couple who first asked us to an information night or to go on a Weekend?
2. HDIF when we ask a couple to an Information Night?
3. HDIF when a couple says yes, they want to go on a Weekend?
4. HDIF when a couple says no, they don't want to go on a weekend?
5. HDIF when I want to recruit a couple and you don't?
6. HDIF when a couple we've asked comes home from a Weekend and thanks us for the gift of dialogue?

WILL YOU DO IT?

By Father Chuck Gallagher S.J.

Delivered At the 1988 Worldwide Marriage Encounter
National Convention

You've been so good to me over the years. My heart is filled with the deepest gratitude. Your fidelity to me for 20 years has been awesome. I can truly say that I feel like the most blessed priest in this day and age, because of the constant love that you have poured out to me. You have given me a gift that is most precious. You have allowed me to be significant in your life. No greater privilege can any person receive. And most, what you've put up with!

You've allowed me to talk about male chauvinism and maybe even more dangerous, female superiority. I've talked about masculine irresponsibility and no-power, being counter-cultural, and being Catholic. You've even allowed me to ask you to become pregnant. Wow!

HERE I AM LORD

You didn't just let me say these things. You took me seriously. You honored me by listening and applying it to your lives. So I think you can see why I feel so blessed. More importantly though, than what I think of you, is what God thinks of you. You religious, priests, and couples have been chosen. Remember that beautiful Hymn, "Here I Am, Lord?" The Lord says, "I have heard my people cry. Whom shall I send?" He has looked on you... John and Barbara, Paul and Sherry, Pete and Nancy... and said, "I will send you." He has looked down on each one of you smiling and said, "This is my beloved daughter. This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to her! Hear thee him!"

Will you accept that He is saying that about you? That He has chosen you especially to be about His business? Oh my dear ones, I don't have to persuade you that you've been so blessed by the Lord in being chosen. Just remember, dears, the Lord never chooses anyone for the sake of the person chosen. He always chooses for the sake of those who are NOT chosen. You are so good. More importantly, you are so needed.

For so long, my brothers and sisters, we have complained about what is happening to Marriage Encounter. I don't think any of us are completely at ease or completely satisfied with what has been happening. We're all good people and we've tried very hard, all sorts of things, but we've missed the main point.

WEEKEND: ENDANGERED SPECIES

We've lost our priority. The same thing happens in marriage. When you start off you must have one another. And then, over the years, you accumulate. You get children, you get added responsibilities, you get possessions. These are all very good things.

But it took a weekend to get us to reprioritize one another. I think the same thing happened in Marriage Encounter. When we started off we just had the weekend. Then we accumulated. We got community, and board meetings, and anniversary weekends, and on and on. All these things are very good things, just like in our marriage, but we lost the priority of our weekend.

There was a time we had 300,000 couples a year making the encounter. Today it's 15,000. That's not a priority. The weekend is becoming an endangered species.

WILL YOU DO IT? (cont'd)

How much time do we spend on Marriage Encounter? How much of that time do you spend on recruiting for the weekend? In the start of marriage and in the start of Marriage Encounter, our priorities were clear. Then we accumulated. I would like to ask you, my loves, to spend this year just on the weekend. Honestly, my loves, the Church can do without everything else about us. It can do without our dialogue, our community, etc., but it cannot, and I believe this deep in my heart - it cannot live successfully without the weekend!

Do you remember on that beautiful weekend we said to you, "Anything that leads to your unity is always God's will. Anything that does not lead to your unity is never His will." So I would like to say this to you: Anything that leads to weekends is always God's will for the encounter. Anything that does not lead to weekends, no matter how good it is in itself, is not God's plan for the encounter!

FOCUS ON OTHERS - NOT SELVES

Whenever I am focusing on you I'm at my best as a priest. Whenever I'm focusing on improving myself I'm at my worst as a priest. There's a fallacy in the encounter that says, "We have to get our act together because unless we're a couple we can't provide anything for others." You're never going to be a perfect couple. That's what heaven is for! Or, you say, "If we're a good couple, all else will happen." Would you raise your children that way? You're such a good couple you don't need to feed them? That kind of thinking leads to collapse of Marriage Encounter.

Actually when we focus on our weekend, we do most for our own marriage. It is not community that builds weekends. It is the weekend that builds community!

I suppose you've heard this story a lot of times, but I'm going to tell it again. In 1971, a handful of us, maybe a dozen sat down and looked at a map of the United States and we saw that we had thousands and thousands of couples who had been blessed with Marriage Encounter, and they were all in New York. We said, "That's terrible." So we went through the Catholic directory and we picked out the ten most Catholic cities in the United States. Then we decided that in the next two years we would establish the encounter in every one of those cities. We did it! That's why you're here! I'll tell you something. Outside of those twelve couples, everybody said we were nuts. They said it couldn't be done.

A CORNERSTONE TO RELATIONSHIP: SELF

A loving growing and life-giving relationship between husband and wife presupposes one important thing: that both individuals have a loving and compassionate understanding of themselves. A mature person with a good self-image understands that he has a responsibility for his own self-worth and personal growth. Yes, we all need praise and re-affirmation from our spouses, but whether or not that exists should not govern our ability to love ourselves and develop our good qualities. Sometimes we use the "we" of our marriages as an excuse not to develop the "I". Coupleness often becomes the copout we use to give us an excuse for apathy, self-pity and self-centeredness.

There is also a great fear involved in allowing you, my spouse, the freedom to reach your full potential. We must grow to realize that if we love our spouse with an unselfish love, if we forget ourselves in loving, our spouse will naturally be called to greater growth, a growth that will enhance us both. Two important gifts come from a healthy self-image and they are freedom and peace. A poor self-image is very imprisoning, it builds walls between spouses.

I. Learning to accept the self I encounter

- A. Share the successes and failures I have experienced in trying to realize that all growth begins with a joyful self-acceptance.
 - 1. Do I love who I am, good and bad, not a dream of what I can be?
 - 2. Have I learned to recognize even the small goodnesses (qualities) and have I tried to cultivate them?
 - 3. Am I forgiving of my faults, while trying to grow beyond them?
 - 4. Do I believe that true freedom comes from a good self-image?
 - 5. Do I honestly recognize my own feelings?

II. Taking responsibility for my own self-worth.

- A. Share the attitudes and/or misconceptions I have about self-worth and their effects on my self-image.
 - 1. Comment on some typical attitudes and/or misconceptions that affect my self-worth (choose those that apply and comment, or find your own).
 - a. I am/am not worthwhile because I do/do not make a great deal of money.
 - b. I am/am not worthwhile because my husband has an influential position.
 - c. I am/am not worthwhile because I do/do not have a good education.
 - d. I am/am not worthwhile because my wife is pretty or efficient.
 - 2. Do I see my worth in doing rather than being?
 - a. I am worthwhile because: I do volunteer work I hold two jobs I teach Sunday School I keep a clean house
 - b. I am not worthwhile because: I am just a housewife I am just a blue-collar worker I am just a lay person I am just average.
- B. Share the importance of believing in my own goodness.
 - 1. If I don't accept all of me, I will never let you see all of me.
 - 2. You cannot give me a good self-image; you can only affirm the goodness that is already there.

A CORNERSTONE TO RELATIONSHIP: SELF (cont'd)

III. Share the blocks that I have that prevent me from accepting growth and change in you.

- A. The fear that you will grow beyond me or ask me to grow.
- B. The fear of rocking the boat.
- C. Criticism.
 - 1. Criticism aimed at who you are destroys your confidence.
 - 2. Criticism, even shared positively, is not relationship building and doesn't build your self-image.

IV. Share the positive ways we have found to foster growth in each other. (Share an important one for you and/or mention others.)

- A. When I believe-that you are unique and that God speaks to you as an individual, as well as to us as a couple, I encourage your personal prayer.
- B. I try to remember to praise and affirm your good points.
- C. I freely express my feelings to you.
- D. Realizing that I cannot solve your problems, solving your problems leaves you dependent and immature.
- E. Being "you" centered, loving you unconditionally.
- F. Loving myself first, or I cannot love you.

V. Share our understanding of "love one another" as a challenge to encourage growth within you.

Share from your personal story the joy and liberation that comes from moving away from the selfishness of a bad self-image to the living of a "you" centered "us".

VI. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What is the biggest block I have to fully taking responsibility for who I am?

VII. SHARING QUESTION: How must I change in awareness and attitude to encourage and allow you to grow?

ENCOUNTER WITH SELF

This talk is given to get each of us to look at ourselves and to see more clearly what our self-image is - that we do not fully appreciate our goodness as persons. We all wear masks. A mask is a way of behaving; a pattern of my activities. We wear masks because through them we see our own value, our acceptability to others. Becoming aware of our masks allows us to experience a deeper personal awareness. The judgments of inadequacy we often make upon ourselves and the feelings we have about ourselves as a result, prevent us from sharing ourselves and from responding to the love of our spouse and others. In order to be fully open to another, we must be open to ourselves and recognize ourselves as good.

I. What mask do I wear?

- A. Describe how you wear this mask.
 - 1. How you act
 - 2. What you say and do
 - 3. Exaggeration of mask

II. Share the judgments you make when you don't wear your masks.

Share both positive and negative.

III. Share your reaction to the statement "God Does Not Make Junk".

IV. Share how your self-image affects your relationship with your spouse.

V. Share how your self-image affects your dialogue.

VI. Share how your self-image affects your relationship with: God, Family, and Community.

V. Dialogue Question: What quality do I like best in you and HDMAMMF?

VI. Sharing Question: Share how your masks affect your relationship with your spouse.

VII. Scripture Reading: Genesis 1: 26-31.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

- 1. What new qualities have I discovered in myself through dialogue? HDMAMMF?
- 2. Do I accept the words "God Does Not Make Junk"?
- 3. Do I help others see their goodness? HDMAMMF?

**PLEASE SHARE YOUR JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF GIVING PRESENTATION.
BE YOURSELVES!**

KEEPING EACH OTHER NUMBER ONE

This presentation is on the day-to-day joys and struggles we experience in trying to keep our spouse number one. There are many distractions that can creep into our lives to prevent this. But the closeness we experience when we do accomplish it, makes the struggle worthwhile.

I. What prevents me from keeping my spouse number one? (Husband/Wife both share)

- A. My moods
- B. Job
- C. Children
- D. Any other areas (money, etc.)

II. What do we consciously do as a couple to keep us number one? Describe the closeness you feel when you do this.

- A. The little day-to-day ways
- B. Time together
- C. Activities

III. How does our dialogue help us to keep the focus on each other?

IV. When we are number one, how does God enter into our relationship? (Possible areas: nature, personal relationship, people)

V. How does our closeness or lack of it affect:

- A. Our family
- B. Community

VI. Dialogue Question: How do I feel when you put me number one?

VII. Sharing Question: Share with us ways that you put each other first.

VIII. Scripture Reading: Matthew 19: 3-6.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

1. HDIF when you reach out more to others than you do to me?
2. HDIF when we put activities before our relationship?
3. WAMF about consciously taking one night a week just for us?

**PLEASE SHARE JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF GIVING THIS PRESENTATION.
BE YOURSELVES**

TRUST

TRUST is
TRUST is keeping your word.
TRUST is the willingness to communicate.
TRUST is being there.
TRUST is consistency.
TRUST is saying "I understand," "I believe in you." "Touch me," "I care."
TRUST is not needing to explain.
TRUST is a responsibility.
TRUST is a compliment.
TRUST is an open feeling, being open.
TRUST is a willingness to be vulnerable.
TRUST is without fear.
TRUST is a reciprocal thing.
TRUST is knowing one another.
TRUST is not taking advantage.
TRUST is different things to different people
Above all
TRUST is risky.

OUR VOCATION TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

The purpose of this presentation is to let the couples realize that Marriage is a vocation, that God has a stake in how we live our relationship in terms that. He wants a couple to revel in that relationship.

I. Marriage in God's Plan

- A. Everybody who cares and dares to look recognizes the relationship between husband and wife as the most encompassing and most basic relationship that can exist between two human beings. (Short, clear, understandable statement.)
- B. This is God's very own plan. Marriage is a vocation revealed to us in Scripture (Genesis and Ephesians) and spoken to us by the church. God used the basic relationship and so does Christ.
- C. The purpose of this section is to show them the awesomeness of this vocation. Examples of your everyday lives and of repeated experiences you had of being awed, told in a simple and relatable way, should bring the couples to reminisce and make them say, "Yeah, we experienced that too!"

(At the end of this section, the couples should experience a measure of awe and joy about their vocation to love one another.)

II. God has a stake in how we live our relationship.

We have the power and responsibility to make His plan come true or we can thwart His plan. His stake in our relationship is OUR glory, to be madly and determinedly in love.

Tell your own life story. Don't explain concepts, but make everything come alive by sharing how you are constantly building your community of love: loving, listening, trusting, challenging each other in your living room, bedroom and kitchen. Why you changed certain behaviors of yours, attitudes you became aware of, modified, and acted against. Use relatable and everyday examples, little things rather than milestones.

Don't mention parallels at as we don't want to shock them into the awareness that there are parallels through the dialogue and sharing questions.

(After this section, couples should be willing to renew their commitment to each other through dialogue.)

III. DIALOGUE QUESTION: When I find delight in our sexual relationship, what difference does that make in my relationship with God? HDMAMMF?

IV. SHARING QUESTION: What is my attitude about our responsibility to make God's plan for our marriage come true? HDIFAMA?

EXPERIENCING DAILY AWARENESS OF EACH OTHER

This talk is to get the couples to examine their own awareness of each other and to remind them of this need in their relationship on a daily, rather than a "sometime" basis. (Caution -- this is not a talk on dialogue.)

I. Awareness of each other

- A. Before weekend
- B. During weekend
- C. Now

II. Temptations we face daily in the modern world

- A. How it strives to pull us apart.
- B. How we attempt to overcome it.

III. What it takes to experience each other

- A. Sacrifice -- giving up our own selfishness.
- B. Recognizing spouse for who they are.
 - 1. Allowing individuality.
 - 2. Seeking goodness in spouse.
 - 3. Praise -- complimenting their goodness.
- C. The importance of our love for each other.
 - 1. How we make each other more important.

IV. Dialogue

- A. Its effects on our awareness of each other.
- B. Importance of its daily use.
 - 1. Distance due to lack of dialogue.
 - 2. Closeness experienced because of dialogue.

V. The love of each other reflects the love of God.

- A. Rewards of living this way.
 - 1. Distance experienced.
 - 2. Closeness experienced.

VI. Dialogue Question: What is my awareness of you on a daily basis? HDMAMMF?

VII. Sharing Question: Share with us your urgency for becoming more aware of each other.

LIVING OUR COUPLENESS

I. FORMAT: READING - PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS:

"For this reason a man will unite with his wife and the two will become one."

II. PRESENTATION: (5 minutes - by presenting couple following the sample outline)

- A. To be one in mind
 - 1. Does not mean to think alike.
 - 2. To allow spouse to be part of your day, when you are in each other's presence or not.
 - 3. Share where you are now.
- B. To be one in heart.
 - 1. Share each other's hopes and dreams by dialogue and loving discussions.
 - 2. Share where you are now since your weekend.
- C. To be one in affections.
 - 1. By keeping romance in your relationship.
 - 2. Share where you are now.
- D. Things that distract us from being a couple.
 - 1. Children
 - 2. Job
 - 3. Other duties: household, etc.
- E. How is our coupleness life-giving to others?
 - 1. Sharing and giving to others.
 - 2. Each of us has a beauty in our relationship to share.
 - 3. We are a charisma to the world.

III. READ DIALOGUE QUESTION TO THE GROUP:

HDIF about our growth as a couple as a result of our dialogue?

IV. PLAY SONG: "WHEREVER YOU GO" by Monks of Weston Priory

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGn3uENUEec>

WHEREVER YOU GO

Song of Ruth (Gregory Norbet, OSB)

Wherever you go, I shall go.
Wherever you live, so shall I live.
Your people will be my people,
And your God will be my God too.

Wherever you die, I shall die.
And there shall I be buried beside you.
We will be together forever;
And our love will be the gift of our lives.
(repeat 2)

We will be together forever;
And our love will be the gift of our lives.

LIVING OUR COUPLENESS (cont'd)

V. PRIVATE DIALOGUE

VI. RETURN TO SHARING CIRCLE: Start the sharing and lovingly encourage others to share on the following.

Sharing question: Share with us what your coupleness means to you.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO DIALOGUE ON BEFORE PRESENTING TALK:

1. HDIF when someone tells us that our coupleness has affected them?
2. What special qualities do we have as a couple?
3. How is our coupleness life-giving to others?
4. What does it mean to be one as a couple and HDMAMMF?
5. HDIF about our growth as a couple as a result of our dialogue?
6. How do I give myself to you outside of our dialogue each day? HDMAMMF?

TO SEE OURSELVES MORE CLEARLY

A presentation on Compliments

This presentation is based on compliments, which enable us to see ourselves more clearly through our eyes as well as our spouse's eyes. The way we receive and handle a compliment usually indicates the self-image we see in ourselves. Through tonight's presentation, we'll be able to see how we can use compliments to build our self-image and to grow into a deeper awareness of ourselves and our spouse.

- I. What kind of complements would I like to hear from my spouse, children, friends, others, etc.** Use as many different types of compliments as possible without repeating each other. Where do I like to hear compliments?
- II. How do I react though, when I receive these compliments?**
Give your internal reactions, feelings, and self-judgments, as well as your outward reactions, feelings, and self-judgments. God does not make junk.
- III. How do these compliments affect my self-esteem? Uncomfortable?**
- IV. What do I need to do to believe in the image that others project of me?** Who gives the compliment? Respect.
- V. When I believe in myself and the picture that my spouse and others project of me, how do I respond to my spouse, children, God, and others?**
- VI. Dialogue Question:** HDIF when I receive a compliment from my spouse?
- VII. Sharing Question:** Share with us the compliment you like to receive the most, and your inner and outer reactions to it.
- VIII. Scripture:** Romans 15:1.b.

Other Questions:

1. HDIF when I receive a compliment from you that I judge not worthy of?
2. HDIF when I give you a compliment that you really deserve?
3. HDIF when we receive a compliment as a couple?
4. HDIF when somebody tells me how great you are?

SHARE IN LOVE AND ABOVE ALL, BE YOURSELVES

DID YOU KNOW YOUR ATTITUDE IS SHOWING?

The purpose of this presentation is to uncover our attitudes and discover how our behavior and goal of unity as a couple are affected.

In the first section, it's important to point out that attitudes are "emotional and unconscious" rather than "rational and conscious". One way of doing this is by sharing one belief (conviction), then your attitude and feelings that arise from this. One example could be in the area of exercise. For instance, my conviction might be that weight-lifting is good for your health. If my attitude is that weight-lifting is for self-centered people, I may feel bored or irritated when the subject is brought up. It should be pointed out that convictions are not necessarily lived out, but values are.

Another point that can be brought out in this section is how we've been influenced by home and environment in our attitudes, and also how one attitude can affect every area of life. For couples it's the life's responsibility to get breakfast for the kids.

Then, we point out the reasons we find it tougher to discuss our attitudes than our feelings. One simple reason might be that, "you can't reject or criticize my feelings, but you can reject or criticize my attitude." Personalize this area and find specific examples from your own experiences.

You will only be able to fully develop one or two basic attitudes, as far as showing how this affects my feelings, then behavior, etc. however, it's important to briefly throw out a few from each of you in the first section in order to stimulate their awareness of the many attitudes they each hold.

In Section II, where we develop one of our basic attitudes, It. might be enlightening to the Presenting Couple to take a good look at their attitudes about sex in order to find attitudes in other areas. It's these other attitudes that we want to share in this presentation.

In the final section, a possibility to bring out is how it takes greater trust, reassurance, openness, and listening in our relationship to discuss our attitudes. This is what our dialogue should be leading us to. Personalize this from your own experience.

In this presentation, we should concentrate on sharing our more subtle attitudes like those I have about our home, who should control the bank account and car keys, lasted of areas such as sex and death. Often, it's these very subtle attitudes that aren't shared or discussed and we never give ourselves the chance to fully understand each other.

DID YOU KNOW YOUR ATTITUDE IS SHOWING? (cont'd)

I. Attitudes vs. Feelings.

- A. Define an attitude.
- B. Share some typical attitudes about men, women, and marriage - this can be a humorous interplay among the couple.
- C. Show how my attitudes conflict with my values and or convictions. Give one or two specific examples.
 1. Share feelings which stem from and or support my attitudes.
 2. Difficulty of sharing attitudes vs. feelings.

II. Show how our attitudes affect our behavior.

- A. Share how one basic attitude affect the many areas of our life (i.e., marriage is a 50/50 proposition).
- B. Share attitudes in common which lead to supporting each other's (H or W) separateness. (Be specific and bring out behavior.)
- C. Share a conflict in our relationship.
 1. How my attitude shows.
 2. How it affects growth in our relationship.

III. Show how sharing attitudes has promoted growth in our relationship.

- A. How our dialogue has affected our openness to discussions.
- B. How have we changed our behavior? Be specific and personalize.
- C. Point out the positive effect on our relationship.

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What attitude do I have that interferes most in our relationship?
How does that make me feel?

V. SHARING QUESTION: What behavior change do I need to make in order to overcome my attitudes? Share specific attitude and specific change.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY

C. S. Lewis in his phenomenal little book, Mere Christianity, describes pride as the most cardinal sin - a sin so profound that if we back step far enough it tends to be the root of the vast majority of all our sins of the heart, actions or lack of action. It is so strong and all-encompassing that it literally is a fundamental factor in whom we are. Humility on the other hand is probably the moat Christ like virtue, for it is fundamental to the great three - love, hope and charity. Furthermore, it is the direct opposite of pride, whereby our lives are a struggle between the two. Tonight's presentation subject is Pride and Humility and its effects on our relationship. We ask you not to judge us in our failures and successes, but rather to be open to yourselves to look carefully at your own levels of pride and humility and its effects in yourself and your relationships.

I. How would I describe Pride? How would I describe Humility?

- A. Do I view pride as a fundamental sin and humility as a virtue?
- B. How does it affect the total person? How do I feel in the presence of a prideful person/humble person?

II. Pride is revealed in many ways.

- A. How prideful overall do I judge myself to be?
- B. How does it manifest itself with my spouse (other than arguments), children, others, and God?

III. Our pride tends to be most revealed in our arguments.

How does our pride intensify and prolong our arguments?

IV. How have I tried to replace pride with humility?

- A. How have I tried to use "To love is a decision"? Give overall and specific examples.
- B. How do I feel while replacing pride with humility?
- C. How do I feel later?
- D. What struggles do I still have, and where do I need more strength to succeed?

VI. Dialogue Question: When was a time recently when my pride affected our relationship?

How do I feel about it now?

VII. Open Sharing Question: Share examples of how humility has worked in your relationship.

VIII. Scripture: Luke 14:7-14.

SHARE IN LOVE AND ABOVE ALL, BE YOURSELVES

PRIORITIES: YOURS, MINE, OR OURS

The purpose of this talk is to examine what is important to each of us, and how we can blend our priorities together to promote unity for us as a couple striving to live God's plan.

It isn't necessary for husband and wife to share on each section of the outline. Time will not permit this.

In Section I, it is important to face into our masks and self-image in order to find out why we each have specific needs and desires. Inside our behavior patterns we will find attitudes and values. -It's important to be personal and down to earth with specific examples that are current in our life. "My" priorities are most often "self-centered". Unshared priorities or being silently preoccupied is something that might be shared here especially if it ties in with my mask, both the effects when I am this way and when I choose to have confidence in my spouse and be open.

Section II deals with the things which keep me from listening openly to my spouse. The kind of person my spouse is can be brought in here. In sharing our disillusionment, one member of the team may want to bring out those times when we say, "Why do I feel so alone? I thought this would be something that was important to both of us, etc. We share specifically the decisions to love we make, the ways we get involved in what is important to the other, and how that motivates us to change. Then, we share the difference, when we do listen, how, and/or why. It can be through my realization of the effect that something has on my spouse, both positive and negative.

When we share how we as a couple are facing into our priorities rather than avoiding them and how we're coping with simple everyday life situations. It's important that the couples see how we arrive at mutual agreements by which we live our life together. We want to shake them out of their complacency of "letting things happen". Keeping our relationship in mind, we can share the effect that our decisions have on us, positive and/or negative.

I. Share some of the things that are important to me.

- A. What is it about myself that makes these things important?

Give the effect of my mask on "my" needs, desires, and values. Be personal and specific.

- B. Share my "expectations" about myself and my "assumptions" about my spouse.

- C. Share the qualities about my spouse that give me the confidence to be open.

How does that affect me?

II. Share how I listen to what's important to my spouse.

- A. What prevents me from listening to my spouse (fear of change, need for security, my mask, etc.)?

- B. Disillusionment. Share when disillusionment affects my listening.

- C. Positive ways we listen to our spouse. (Include non-verbal, dialogue, discussion, etc. Be specific.)

PRIORITIES: YOURS, MINE, OR OURS (cont'd)

III. How I am sharing on priorities with my spouse. (Both share everyday examples. Areas of possessions, job, time, finances, relatives, children, etc.)

How we face into everyday situations. Share the effect of dialogue and discussions on making our priorities.

IV. Share how our priorities affect the goals we set as a couple.

Openness to changing our priorities.

V. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What is it about myself that prevents me from listening to you when we discuss our priorities? HDMAMMF?

VI. SHARING QUESTION: What specific area or areas do I least desire to become involved in with you? Why? What specific change do I need to make in myself in order to make our priorities best for us?

HOW OTHER MARRIAGES INFLUENCE OURS

Most likely before our weekend, each couple here tonight had their marriage relationship influenced by other couples' marriages. In other words, we looked at the world's standards in the marriages around us and figured that's the way we should be living out our marriage. But our weekend showed us more. It showed us how to be more of a couple -- more for each other. For our weekend gave each of us the unconditional gift to live God's standards for our marriage and thus show to others that we do have a stake in their ages. That is, we have the responsibility to show them what their ages could be like in the plan of God if only they'd try for it.

I. HOW OTHERS INFLUENCED US

- A. Before our weekend, how did the standards of other marriages influence our marriage? Use specific examples from the following areas married singles, attitudes, children, relatives, God, church, communication, TV, hobbies, jobs, etc.
- B. How did we justify our lifestyle?
- C. How did we compare our marriage to other marriages?

II. CHANGES SINCE WEEKEND

- A. What areas of our lifestyle have changed?
- B. What areas of our lifestyle still need change?
- C. How has/can God help us with these changes of standards?

III. WE HAVE A STAKE IN OTHER MARRIAGES!

- A. What does living out our marriage in the plan of God mean to me?
- B. What standards can we set and share with other couples to show them that we care and have a stake in their marriage? Emphasize III.B. and give specific examples. (This section is the important section of this talk and gets the couples ready for their dialogue.)
- C. Do I see now how God has a stake in our marriage and all other marriages too?
HDTMMF?
- D. Being aware of the stake we have in each other's marriages, how are we benefiting from other couples who share their struggles? Be specific.

IV. Dialogue Question: What standards of ours can we change for the benefit of other couples? HDTMMF?

V. Open Sharing Question: How have we benefited from other couples who have had a stake in our relationship; particularly couples in our flame?

VI. Scripture: Matthew 5:13-16,

SHARE IN LOVE AND ABOVE ALL, BE YOURSELVES

SIGNS OF LOVE

I. Introduction: The Church and Christ have a stake in our marriage. The church is the people, US, and we are called to be a sign of Christ to the world, a sacramental people. We are to be the mirror of God's love for us. Christ instituted the sacraments as signs of His love in the world for His people. Our relationship to one another is our sacrament. Our sacrament involves other people. In tonight's presentation we will discuss-the graces we receive from our sacrament in the first part. In the second part we will focus on the grace of forgiveness.

II. Graces from our sacrament: Our sacrament is something that is living and meant to happen every day. The way we act out our sacrament each day is the same way it happened the first time (our wedding day). We decided to say "yes". Our sacrament is lived out in our daily relationship each time we say "yes". Grace is God's presence within us which we receive as a gift. If God's love is within us, there are certain effects or results of His presence which enables us to give each other signs of love. Grace is a gift, and it makes something possible. Graces are moments of strength we need to: be faithful; forgive; be patient; give comfort; be holy. The grace is there but we must be aware of it and call upon it. We are given many graces for the challenges of our married life. Share how you felt when you first became aware of these graces. How have these graces, or moments of strength, fit into your relationship? Relate a time when and how you have used these graces and how you felt at the time. (Husband and wife relate separate instances.)

III. Sharing Question: How has God's grace recently strengthened your relationship to each other, to your children, or to others?

IV. Forgiveness and healing: Forgiveness is a decision. It must be a free gift of love. Forgiveness doesn't mean that I agree with you but that I will not hold anything against you. Actions require forgiveness. However, certain attitudes and feelings indicate a need for forgiveness. Usually my attitudes and feelings will be acted out in some way. Feelings of embarrassment or shame indicate that I often need to forgive myself or ask forgiveness from others. When I feel anger, resentment, or bitterness I need to forgive others. We must remember that we need to ask for forgiveness not only for the deep hurts, but the little things too. Healing means different things to each of us and we respond to being healed in different ways. With the grace of forgiveness, the grace of healing allows us to go out of ourselves and to heal each other. It also allows us to be healed by others. (Share a time when you were hurt and what went through your mind. What made you decide to heal or be healed and how did you feel?)

V. Open Sharing Question: Will you share with us a time when you experienced some type of healing?

VI. Dialogue Question: How do I feel when you completely forgive me?

VII. Scripture: Matthew 6:14-15 and Luke 23:34

Some dialogue questions for help in preparation:

1. What WAMFA us being called to be a visible sign of the church?
2. WAMF when I experience the forgiveness of God in our relationship?
3. WAMFA the fact that God has a stake in our marriage?
4. HDIF knowing we have been commissioned by God to be an active force in His Kingdom?

OPENNESS TO RECEIVING

I. Introduction: We all have our own ideas about what openness is – reaching out to others in our various communities. But are we really being honest with ourselves? It is easier to give than to receive. Our encounter relationship is based on reaching out to others. Problems may arise when we ourselves need to receive from others. It is difficult for most of us to stretch out our hand and be helped. Our communities are there to give support when we need help with our relationship. Our community of love is there for us. We need to reach out and accept from others. We need to let others be for us.

II. Receiving from my spouse: The most basic community is us, (give your names here). If we are honest, we recognize that there are areas in our lives where we need our spouse's help. Underneath these attitudes are fears and judgments. In order to ask for and accept our spouse's help, it is important to remember that:

- First I need to know what my needs are.
- Sometimes I don't receive because I don't ask.
- Just asking is not enough. I must be open to receive what I have asked for.

These are some of the attitudes that prevent openness:

- He/she should know my needs without having to be told
- I told him/her before --- nothing happened.
- I don't need help--I can handle it myself.

(Each choose one attitude that operates in your relationship and illustrate it with a personal example. Share at least one attitude from each spouse. Take this attitude you've shared and amplify the underlying feeling. Example: If my attitude was, "I told her before and nothing happened." I will think I am unimportant. I feel disappointed, lonely, or sad.)

III. Sharing question: What fears have kept you from asking your spouse for help? By help we mean comfort, support, understanding, etc.

IV. Receiving from others: Just as we need to receive from our spouse, there are times when we as a couple need to receive from our community. The struggle is to change our attitudes and to accept the help we need. Now we will look at the attitudes that keep us from receiving from our community. Being open to receiving as a couple is often difficult. These are some of the attitudes that get in our way:

- People look unto us - we have an image to uphold!
- We can't share our downs - people won't accept them.
- People will see us as less than they expected.
- Attitude of not asking unless we are in a position to return the favor someday
- Attitude of lack of trust in community
- Attitude of imposing or burdening others with our problems.

(Choose one or more of the above attitudes and share a personal example from your own experience. Share your feelings which underlie these attitudes.)

OPENNESS TO RECEIVING (CONT'D)

V. Sharing Question: What fears do I have that have kept me from asking our community for help, or love, or comfort?

VI. Dialogue question: How do I feel thinking about, asking for, and accepting help from you?

VII. Scripture: Luke 11:23

Some dialogue questions for help in preparation:

1. Where do I need help from you? HDIFSTWY?
2. Have I asked you for help? HDTMMF?
3. Am I really willing to accept help from you? HDIFSTWY?
4. Have we ever asked the community to help us? HDIFSTWY?
5. Am I really willing to accept help from others? HDTMMF?

HDIFSTWY: How do I feel sharing this with you?

HDTMMF: How does that make me feel?

UNITY - MARRIAGE IN GOD'S PLAN

- I. Introduction:** It was brought to our attention on our-original weekend that God's plan for marriage is complete unity, not merely sharing a home, money, food and fun. We could share worldly things and still remain strangers. But, in sharing ourselves, we approach unity. Tonight we are going to look at the part of the day when you don't dialogue, and see how it is affected by your dialoguing relationship. That is, we are going to look at striving for unity in and out of dialogue time. And, we will emphasize the closeness that comes from striving to be one.
- II. Unity in dialogue:** We know the goal of dialogue is unity. We want to actually take on the other's feeling so we can become one. In striving to be one we experience beautiful feelings of closeness. Encounter Weekends are special times of closeness. But, do we make similar efforts to reach out in daily dialogue? When we're not in the atmosphere of a weekend, we hopefully take the risk to become vulnerable and try to overcome our doubts and fears. And hopefully we strive for unity of feeling on a daily basis just as hard as we struggled on our Weekend. Unity of feeling in dialogue takes a lot of effort and occurs infrequently, but we can grow so close when we try. As we dialogue on a daily basis, we build our openness. We grow in our ability to share deep feelings with one another. In striving for unity, a climate of trust is established and also feelings of closeness (if you have no feeling of closeness, you may want to evaluate how and why you dialogue). Share a recent (last 2 months) feeling of closeness from your dialogue and how you feel about that closeness now.)
- III. Sharing question:** Share with us your cycles of romance, disillusionment and joy as you strive for unity in your daily dialogue.
- IV. Unity outside of dialogue time:** Dialogue is a way of life and the closeness we attain in our 20 minutes a day does not end there. Our openness to feelings in dialogue should create an atmosphere of sensitivity in other areas of our relationship. We grow in understanding not only feelings but attitudes, values and goals. (Share a recent example from your day to day relationship, other than dialogue time, when you were open and sensitive to your spouse and how you feel about that. Example: Your spouse came home and the non-verbal said something was wrong, you felt a concern.)
- If we are achieving a oneness and closeness in our dialogue, then we should see the effects. The closeness in dialogue should carry through to the closeness outside of dialogue time. Reaching for unity opens us to ourselves, to our spouse, to others and to God. Dialogue can offer us the hope and the possibility to grow, overcome troubles and change to become the best that the Lord wants us to be. If we are striving for unity to live out God's plan for this world, through dialogue or other means, then our life will change for the better. (Share in yourselves or in another relationship, 2 or 3 ways in which you are opening up and therefore reaching a deeper unity in your marriage. For example, ability to overcome fears and how you feel about that: God is more a part of your life and how you feel about that; more open in your sexual relationship and how you feel about that).
- V. Sharing Question:** In what ways has striving for unity affected our relationship or your life?

UNITY - MARRIAGE IN GOD'S PLAN (cont'd)

VI. Dialogue Question: In what ways do I see the closeness in our dialogue affecting the closeness in our relationship and how do I feel sharing this with you.

VII. Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Some Dialogue question to help in preparation:

1. Why do we dialogue? HDTMMF?
2. Do we strive for unity in our dialogue? HDTMMF?
3. In what ways am I open to you in dialogue? HDTMMF?
4. What attitudes prevent me from giving myself more totally to you in dialogue? HDIFSTWY?
5. Am I as understanding of you in our daily relationship as in dialogue? HDIFSTWY?
6. How have we grown in closeness since dialoguing? HDIFSTWY?

LEISURE

I. Introduction: God has given us many gifts to build our relationship as husband and wife dialogue, sex, prayer. These gifts build up our emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual relationships. They should not be taken for granted. They are decisions to love that call for action (remember that love is an action verb). Another gift which God has given us is the gift of play or leisure time. This is all the ways we can laugh with each other and enjoy each other. Too often, we take this area of recreation for granted or just table our free time until the weekend. Perhaps even until our next vacation. Sometimes we simply over-program our spare time and it becomes as demanding as our daily work. The word recreation means to re-create. Perhaps to begin again, to meet again. In fact, the marriage encounter weekend is a time for recreation. It removes all worldly distractions so we have more freedom to laugh, to cry, and play with one another. This presentation looks at how we value our free time and enjoy one another.

II. Leisure time attitudes: Leisure time is often menacing to people. Frequently we become frustrated because we are not having as much fun as we think we should, or not getting as much work done as we should. Some examples of attitudes about leisure time are:

- Summer is for play, winter is for work.
- No time for leisure now, success is more important leisure planning and preparation is more work for me.
- The week is for work, weekends are for leisure. (Share a time when an attitude affected your leisure time and how you felt about it. Try to share both a positive and a negative attitude).

III. Sharing question: Share an attitude you have about your leisure time.

IV. Leisure time and our relationship: In this section we will look at how our attitudes toward leisure time affect our marriage relationship. When summer comes, most of us have high hopes for several happy and fulfilling months. Using our married singles attitudes, we tend to spend leisure time apart, golf, fishing, sunbathing, tennis, etc. As couples, we should strive to unify our relationship by including each other in our leisure time. (Share a time when you enjoyed some leisure time together and how you felt. This does not necessarily have to be a vacation time maybe it was a special meal, yard party, a picnic, etc. Be sure to share how you felt being a couple. Or, you could share a time when you grew as a couple by spending leisure time together and how you felt. Be sure to share your feelings in either of the above sharings.)

V. Sharing Question: Share a time when you enjoyed your leisure time together and how this affected your relationship.

VI. Dialogue Question: How do I feel about making the decision to spend more of our leisure time together?

VII. Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

LEISURE (cont'd)

Dialogue questions to help you prepare:

1. What fun things do I most enjoy doing? HDIFSTWY?
2. Does my leisure time include you? HDIFSTWJY?
3. IDIF when we spend our leisure time together?
4. How often do we laugh with each other, or take a walk, or fly a kite together? HDIFAT?

HDIFSTWY: How do I feel sharing this with you?

HDIF: How do I feel?

HDIFAT: How do I feel about that?

SEEING OUR GOODNESS

(From the Weekend talk - Encounter With Self)

- I. Introduction:** When we know our good qualities, we will be able to love and love ourselves more. And the better we like ourselves, the more able we are to see the goodness in others and tell them of it. By being aware of our good qualities, we also know what gifts we have to offer. Tonight we are going to focus on the goodness in ourselves and how we accept compliments - how we accept the goodness that others see in us.
- II. Accepting our goodness:** On the original Weekend we made a list of virtues and defects. We tend to emphasize our defects more (longer list). Tonight we will work to emphasize the good qualities and how we accept them. Our virtues and defects combine to form the unique individual we are. God loves us regardless of our good and bad qualities. Remember the banner on your weekend - God doesn't make junk. We are called to do the same, love ourselves regardless of our mood and bad qualities. Each of you shares a good quality of yours and how you feel about sharing it right now. Try to each share a quality that you are comfortable with sharing and one you are not comfortable with sharing. Our behavior can often point to a good quality. For example, when I am being patient with the children, I see self as a good parent. I have proud feelings about myself and therefore able to love myself and be more loving.)
- III. Sharing Question:** Share a good quality of yours and how you feel about sharing it with us.
- IV. Accepting compliments from others:** Often it is difficult to accept compliments because of our attitudes about the person who lives the compliment and about ourselves. Sometimes, we may question the motives of the person giving the compliment because of our attitude. We may ask ourselves, "Does he/she have an ulterior motive? Is he/she trying to manipulate me?" Or we judge ourselves with questions such as, "Am I worthy of the compliment?" or "Do I see that quality as really applying to me?"
- These attitudes cause us to accept or reject the compliment. A decision to accept the compliment is a decision to love ourselves and the person giving it. (Share a compliment you recently received and how it made you feel? Make sure this compliment is about a personal quality rather than a personal appearance or talent. The ones about personal qualities are the deepest and help us to look further into ourselves. Really focus on the feelings you had about yourself when you received the compliment.)
- V. Sharing Question:** Share a compliment about a personal quality of yours that you received and how you felt receiving it.
- VI. Dialogue Question:** What do I see as my best quality and how do I feel sharing it with you?

A KEY TO LIVING DIALOGUE

This presentation proceeds from the premise that living dialogue as opposed to performing a ritual requires a deep level of trust and a willingness to continue to re-evaluate. It may easily be seen that the questions for re-evaluation are not really so much questions about our dialogue as they are about our relationship. And they are questions with a purpose, since there are specific ways we can proceed with each other and with dialogue that will make all the difference. Most of these ways are not new, but they will us to a sensitivity with each other that is easily overlooked in, e.g., our desire to see measurable results in dialogue, or our taking dialogue (and perhaps each other) for granted. Our growth in this reflective and sensitive spirit, however, cannot be viewed apart from where our dialogue is leading us. Unless we allow dialogue to be an open-ended experience that leads us to change our life together for sake of each other, then we've missed the whole point. It is intended that the couples be warmly invited to taste the beginning of the closer, more dynamic relationship we ourselves are striving to live.

I. Beginning to trust.

- A. Share your growth in being honest about your dialogue and yourselves, with emphasis on these areas:
 - 1. Admitting where we've truly fallen short.
 - 2. Not being afraid to appear less in the eyes of others because we're not the "perfect encountered couple".
 - 3. Not being afraid to ask questions about how we're living together.
- B. Share how you have re-evaluated and continue to re-evaluate your dialogue in these ways:
 - 1. Asking why do we do what we do in our dialogue.
 - 2. Asking why we are or aren't dialoguing.
 - 3. Asking whether what we're doing is the best we can do.
 - 4. Sharing together which false attitudes and which masks about dialogue have been barriers to our relationship and deciding to put these aside.
 - 5. Deciding to begin again to see and treat our dialogue as an exciting opportunity and way for us to transform our lives with each other and others.

II. Living our dialogue.

Share how you try to listen and be sensitive to each other before you dialogue and throughout the day.

III. Dialogue Question: What changes can we make to get the most out of our dialogue? HDIFAT?

IV. Open Sharing

THE SECRET OF STAYING IN LOVE

* READING: "THE SECRET OF STAYING IN LOVE" by John Powell, p. 188.

"Dialogue is to love what blood is to the body. When the flow stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the cycle of dialogue.

There are no winners and losers in dialogue, only winners. Neither partner is ever required to give up or give in, but only to give, to give of himself. In dialogue, we can never end up with less than we were, but only more. To live in dialogue with another is to live twice. Joys are doubled by exchange and burdens are cut in half by sharing. The listening and the speaking of dialogue each with its own particular set of consequences, are each directed to the other. Dialogue is essentially an act of the purest love and "The Secret of Staying In Love".

*PRESENTATION: (15 minutes)

I. What dialogue means to us.

- A. How it strengthens our relationship.
- B. How it renews our love.
- C. Share our own experiences.

II. What hinders our dialogue?

- A. Prime time.
- B. Getting hung up on how to do it.
- C. Disillusionment.

III. Changes that took place through dialogue.

- A. Closeness.
- B. Dialogue is the tool which we used to grow with.

IV. Where are we going with our dialogue?

Share yourselves.

V. Play Song: "WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN" by The Carpenters

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VQX2Xn7tI

VI. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What is my commitment to our dialogue and HDMAMMF?

VII. Open Sharing: Lovingly encourage others to share on the following question: Share with us your experiences with dialogue.

Helpful questions to dialogue on before presenting talk:

1. What are my feelings when you heal me in dialogue?
2. What effect has dialogue made in our lives and HDTMMF?
3. How do I feel when we miss dialogue?
4. HDIF when I/you put activities before our relationship?

CONFIDENCE IN OUR DIALOGUE

I. Introduction: The confidence we are going to talk about tonight is the confidence in ourselves and the confidence in our dialog technique - our own special uniqueness. On our weekend we learned a technique for dialogue. But as time has passed in trying to follow this, we may have become wedded to the WEDS outline. We tend to lose sight of the fact that the important decision is to share ourselves in a deeper way. In the first part of tonight's presentation we are going to explore different ways of making our dialogue a unique and positive experience. In the second part we want to share how dialogue has made our relationship more alive.

II. Confidence in our dialogue technique: The fact that we care enough about our relationship to try to deepen it through dialogue is what is important. Once we have made that commitment, there is no right way to dialogue - only what is unique to our relationship. We want to focus in on how the WEDS formula can be adapted to fit our own individual dialogue. We can be flexible about when, where and how we write and dialogue. Variations in technique include:

- Time - Be open and flexible to time. It could be after lunch on Saturday, early in the morning or after dinner. Just be sure to set a specific time or your dialogue for the next day.
- Place - It could be a hammock, the car, the front porch, the bathtub, a closet - anywhere that is free from distractions for you to write and dialogue.
- Technique - You might pray first; begin your love letter with a TNT (the nicest thing about your spouse that day); spend some time reflecting on the dialogue question before writing.
- After reading the letters and dialoging on the feeling you and your spouse have chosen, there may be a need to make love, hold one another, cry together, forgive and or be forgiven.

Share your attitudes and feelings concerning the techniques you use in your dialogue from a one or two of the above areas. Maybe try something new for you and share your feelings and attitudes about the changes.

III. Open Sharing Question: What is your attitude about the way you dialogue and what changes would you like to try?

IV. Success in Dialogue: Whatever techniques we use to add variety, spice, or achieve the extra meaning, we must continue to try to be committed to the concept of daily dialogue. Through this commitment and the actual dialogue, our relationship grows. Our confidence in dialogue and the deepening of our relationship come from sharing our struggles as well as our joys. So we ask you now to join us as we share such a growth experience from one of our love letters. (Each spouse is to set the scene as well as read a meaningful love letter... one from which there was a strengthening of your relationship. Share how you felt after the dialogue)

V. Dialogue Question: What value do I place on our daily dialogue and how do I feel sharing this with you?

VI. Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-16.

CONFIDENCE IN OUR DIALOGUE (cont'd)

Some dialog questions to help you prepare:

1. What do I like most about our dialogue? HDIFSTWY?
2. What do I like least about our dialogue? HDIFSTWY?
3. What are my attitudes about trying new techniques in our dialogue? HDTMMF?
4. What attitudes of mine help our dialogue? HDTMMF?
5. What attitudes of mine hinder our dialogue? HDTMMF?
6. How do I feel as I consider sharing one of my actual love letters with our Circle /Flame?

THE ART AND JOY OF LISTENING

The purpose of the presentation is: 1) to have the couples experience what prevents them from and what helps them to listen to each other; 2) how, through listening to each other, they find more of each other.

To be able to give this presentation, you really have to prepare yourselves. You need to talk and discuss a whole lot between the two of you, candidly and honestly. What is it that makes you into a hard trodden path, a piece of land with a thin layer of topsoil? What are the thistles and thorns? What do you need to be fertile soil?

I. Listening

- A. What prevents us from listening to each other? Attitudes, masks, personality, fears, expectations, married singleness, "peace at any price."
- B. What helps us listen to each other? What do I need to be a good listener? Verbal and non-verbal interaction, playback, specific behavior.

II. Learning

- A. What have we learned about each other through our listening?
- B. How do we respond to each other because of our listening?
- C. What are the specific fruits of our listening in our relationship? What have we discovered or rediscovered?

III. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What qualities have I discovered in you through my listening to you?

IV. SHARING QUESTION: What behavior or masks of mine interfere most with my listening to you?

LISTENING

I. Introduction: Listening is more than hearing with your ears. It is an emotional involvement with your spouse. It is a decision to put yourself aside for your spouse. Only when we attempt to hear each word and notice each expression can we deeply understand in our hearts one another's feelings. When we are able to accept these feelings without judgments, we come to know just how precious our love for each other has become. In the first part of this presentation we will focus on the attitudes and judgments that hinder listening.

II. Attitudes that hinder listening: An attitude is a belief or a point of view about a situation, the people in the situation, or myself in the situation. Attitudes are preconceived ideas and may make honest sharing difficult. Attitudes are not necessarily facts, but may arise out of misconceptions. Attitudes of superiority hinder our ability to really listen to one another. Some of these attitudes are:

- Attitudes of indifference --- "nothing can touch me because you aren't that important."
- Attitude of inferiority -- "my need to be heard is more important than your need to be listened to. I am the final decision maker regarding my goodness, so nothing you will say will matter." Some of the fears that you can consider which might underlie your attitude of superiority are:
 - Fear of change - "if I really listen to you I might see the need to change."
 - Fear of criticism -- "If I really listen to you, I'm going to hear you tell me something that is not good about me."
 - Fear of being used -- "all you want from me is a sounding board."
 - You might consider other fears -- disapproval, ridicule, rejection.

(Share what attitudes and possibly what fears might prevent you from truly listening to your spouse and how that makes you feel.)

III. Sharing question: Share a specific time when an attitude or attitudes kept you from really listening to your spouse.

IV. Success in listening to others: In this part we will focus in on the successes we have had in truly listening to our spouse. When we truly listen, we are not afraid, because what we seek is understanding, not victory. Listening calls for a response in love. When I am really listening I acknowledge and respect my spouse's otherness - the uniqueness that makes him/her special. (Share a time when you were able to set aside your own attitudes and truly listen to your spouse. -share how you felt when this happened.)

V. Sharing question: Share a time when you were able to set aside yourself and listen to your spouse.

VI. Special reading (just prior to 10 & 10)

With your ear, may you hear each word as something precious.

With your mind, may you humbly search to understand.

With your eye, may you notice the non-verbal message.

With your heart, may you listen with real love.

With your hearing and understanding, may loving be lasting,

As enduring as a precious stone.

LISTENING (cont'd)

VII. Dialogue Question: When recently did I see you as really listening to me or not listening to me? How does that make me feel?

VIII. Scripture: Matthew 13:16

Some dialogue question to help in preparation:

1. HDIF when I listen to you?
2. HDIF when I want to be listened to?
3. In what areas have I not been able to listen to you? HDTMMF?
4. What attitudes in myself do I see that prevent me from listening to you and HDTMMF?

ROMANCE IS NOT A CURE-ALL

Through our weekend, we experienced once again the romance we knew when we fell in love with each other, but in new and deeper ways. Since our weekend, perhaps just as since our early days of romance, our views of romance prevent us from experiencing romance in a continually alive way. Romance is a way of life. This is not to say that doing romantic things for each other is not good, but if we recall our early experience of loving each other, we will remember how we were so focused on each other that romance was not mechanical. We didn't have to make it happen. It flowed from our relationship. It was not a Band-Aid to cover up wounds or hurts. Nor was it a cure-all tonic. It flowed from our relationship. We were laying down our lives for each other and it showed.

Wherever we are with romance, hopefully we will want to go a step further all the time. Can we to ever be as tender, as affectionate to each other, as present to each other as we could be? This presentation is meant to remind us that romance is a growing process. It is meant to allow us to begin anew in our call to be lovers. -

I. What is this thing called Romance?

- A. Share your basic attitudes and expectations about romance. Share the period of time during your courtship days and today. Be specific and give examples.
- B. Share on myths about romance that you may have accepted or experienced which may include these:
 - 1. Romance is a his or her activity.
 - 2. Romance is gushy feelings.
 - 3. Romance is happiness.
 - 4. Romance is a certain atmosphere, like dim lights and soft music.
 - 5. Romance is smoothing things over.

II. Romance in our relationship

- A. Share your attitudes about romance in your relationship which keep you from being involved with each other. Include these attitudes that you may have lived:
 - 1. We're too busy for romance.
 - 2. Romance is only for special times of the day.
 - 3. Romance is a thing - we can just turn on or off.
 - 4. We don't need romance - we've grown beyond that.
 - 5. Romance is thinking of sex first.
- B. Share how you are developing a spirit of real romance.
 - 1. Share how you share together your hopes and dreams, when and how you succeed and fail, your struggles and successes, your hurts and disappointments, your whole experience.
 - 2. Share what it's like relinquishing the urge to conquer and dominate each other.
 - 3. Share how romance is tenderness - with affection, friendship, and kindness.
 - 4. Share how romance is risking - being vulnerable with each other.
 - 5. Share how romance is making and taking time to care and listen to each other throughout the day.

ROMANCE IS NOT A CURE ALL (cont'd)

C. Share on the effect of renewed romance in your relationship.

1. How is it being more excited about each other?
2. How does it help you appreciate each other more?
3. How does it help you be more outreaching and giving?
4. How does it help you celebrate who you are and who you want to become for each other?
5. How does it bring you closer to God through each other?

(NOTE: In sharing on the effect of renewed romance in your relationship, include those areas in which you are not yet living this spirit but are trying to do so. Be specific and give examples throughout.)

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What changes do I need to make in order to renew romance in our relationship? HDIFAT?

V. OPEN SHARING QUESTIONS: How do we need to change our life style for romance to be a way of life? From our own experience, what do I see as the difference between doing romantic things and romance as tenderness?

OUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP AND ME

Most of us probably put our sexuality in a slot, away from the rest of our lives. That in actuality is impossible, as our sexual being is who we are and we must learn that our masculinity and femininity affect who we are twenty-four hours a day. Unless I can identify who I am sexually and deal with the attitudes I possess, our sexual relationship will never be what it was meant to be, that is intimate, life-giving communication. There are certain basic needs and desires within us that are present because we are human, and there are other attitudes and behavior patterns that we possess in our sexuality that have been instilled in us by our environment. In this talk, we want to examine those "environmentally" acquired attitudes that influence who we are sexually and ultimately what we bring to the acts of physical loving that occur in our marriage. Any "hang ups", expectations, demands, fears or doubts are rooted in our lack of being able to understand, recognize and accept our own growth process as sexual beings. Unless we can understand who we are and where we have come from, and share that in intimate conversation and open physical expression, we will never grow up sexually.

I. What is sexuality? Share a brief explanation.

- A. The way of being and relax to the world as a male or female person.
- B. Sexuality is the aspect of our flesh and blood being which makes us present and open to another.
- C. Sexuality serves to call us to the constant realization that we need to reach out to others to achieve personal fulfillment.
- D. Sexuality is God's gift with in us that calls us out of isolation and into relationship with others.

II. What is my sexual self-image?

- A. Share my awareness of myself as a sexual being.
- B. Share my understanding of my attitudes about the sex act and identify their formation.
 - 1. Share the sexual mask I wear (Mr. Animal, Mrs. Passive, Mrs. Light-Off, Mr. Me First, Mrs. Straight, Mr. I'll Try Anything once).
 - 2. Share some comments that I heard growing up that helped form me in my sexuality. (Men are animals; women don't enjoy sex, etc.)
 - 3. Share three incidences that have formed a sense of sexual inadequacy in me (one from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood - nothing real traumatic please!)
 - a. Being reminded in front of a group of adults that a proper young lady doesn't cross her legs or going in the locker room and discovering that I'm the only one with no hair on my legs.
 - b. Hearing you're a lousy kisser from your brother who heard it in the locker room from your last date.
 - c. Trying to kiss a girl for the first time and missing her mouth.
 - d. The shock of discovering that I find that nice man down the street attractive.
 - e. The first time I say "no" to her because I'm not in the mood.

OUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP AND ME (cont'd)

III. Share how knowing more of who I am as a sexual being has improved our sexual relationship.

- A. Disillusionment in sex is more than perfection of an activity or making each other feel good.
- B. Share how I see the sex act as communication.
 - 1. Do I understand you more during and after love-making?
 - 2. Is my whole personhood involved?
 - a. Do I talk to you before, during and after we make love?
 - b. Do I listen to you with my whole being to find out what you are really communicating when we make love?
- C. Share our attempts to constantly re-examine our personal attitudes about sex and who we are as sexual beings.
 - 1. "Hang ups" are better dealt with if shared with honesty and tenderness.
 - 2. Increased activity is not a solution to problems - we must deal with our total self-hood.
 - 3. I must love myself in other ways before I can love my sexual self.
 - 4. When I can accept my own sexuality, then I can allow you to love me in a freer way.

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What mask do I wear in our sexual relationship? HDTMMF?

V. OPEN SHARING QUESTION: What changes do I have to make to become more aware of my sexual self-identity?

EXPERIENCING EACH OTHER IN SEX/SEX AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION.

Purpose: To get couples to examine their individual sexual attitudes. To help couples view sex as a form of communication, to gain the confidence to share their feelings with one another in the area of their sexual relationship.

I. Awareness of your own sexuality before dialogue

- A. Share your modern world training (in the area of sex) from friends, family, media.
 - 1. More attitudes you had about sex before your marriage, and how we talked about sex.
 - 2. Share attitudes you had about sex in early years of your marriage, and how we talked about sex.
 - 3. Share where you were in your attitudes and feelings about your sexual relationship just prior to your Encounter weekend (satisfied/unsatisfied/didn't discuss it).

II. Dialoguing in the area of sex

- A. Give recap of early experiences dialoguing on the area of sex, including both positive and negative fee shared and if you felt comfortable or uncomfortable in these sharings.
- B. Describe the differences in your relationship when you are open and share your deepest feelings in dialogue on your sexual relationship.
- C. As we grow and change, so does our dialogue. We continue to choose questions relating to sex because our feelings change.

III. Sexual communications

- A. How we communicate to one another through our sexual relations. Do we give of self, or give service?
- B. Vulnerability.
 - 1. Openness to each other means being vulnerable.
 - 2. In dialogue we may be distant and closed, for fear of being laughed at, or rejected. In our sexual relationship, we may fear the same rejection if we expose our feelings about sex.
 - 3. Share the joys and closeness you have experienced when you had the confidence in your spouse to risk sharing your feeling in the area of your sexual relationship. Describe the closeness in loving detail.

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What are my hopes for our future use of sex as a tool of communication? HDTMMF?

V. OPEN SHARING QUESTION: Please share what your hope for you as a couple is in to focus on sex as communication.

COMMUNICATING SEXUALITY IN OUR HOME

Purpose: To show how our attitudes affect our children and to bring about an awareness of how we are expressing our sexuality to our family.

Before writing this talk, spend a minimum of one week dialoguing on questions meaningful to you that would help in prepare this talk. The most important aspect of this presentation is the couple's honesty in giving it. We don't want to sound like the "Perfect" couple - we want to be ourselves sharing our mistakes and uncertainties as well as our successes.

Point out that sexuality involves our entire lifestyle within our family. It isn't something we compartmentalize. Our entire interaction with our spouse and our children depicts the way we communicate sexually in our home. When we share attitudes, we are talking about the way we perceive-an idea, not what we judge the best answer should be. In sharing my attitude about our children's curiosity, depending on their ages, look at my reaction to a young child's curiosity about his own body or those of the opposite sex, or how I've answered questions from older children about sex, or if we have teenagers, how we discuss moral dilemmas they are aware of, particularly premarital sex. Along with sharing my reaction and behavior in these situations, also mention the different kinds of atmosphere we've experienced and our children's reaction to us.

I. Communicating our attitudes about sexuality to our children

- A. Give the attitude I have about my own body, my personal appearance.
- B. Examples of being open to our children's curiosity - answering their questions.
- C. How we share our love for one another in front of our children. (Be specific.) What is their reaction to us?
- D. Ways we are affectionate with our family. Are they different as the children grow older or with our son versus our daughter?

II. Sexuality – Life giving communication: (Life giving refers to our ability to "Give Life" to our children through our positive example and our openness.

- A. How we share with our children the effects of our lovemaking - how the spillover of our closeness touches our relationship with our children. (Not necessarily sharing time and place.)
- B. Dialogue - specific examples of questions that have helped us and how they've helped us grow more aware of our attitudes about sex.
- C. Discussion.
 - 1. Explain the importance of facing into our attitudes and making decisions together to change.
 - 2. The need to be available to our children when they want to talk to us and recognizing the times when they need to talk to us.

III. Share a motivational result of being life giving.

Give a specific example from one of the attitudes shared in Section I of a change you have recently made together as a couple in order to communicate more openly with your family.

COMMUNICATING SEXUALITY IN OUR HOME (cont'd)

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What attitude do I have that keeps me from being life giving in communication about sex with our children? How does my answer make me feel?

V. OPEN SHARING QUESTION: Am I aware of the way we communicate our sexuality to our children? Share specific examples of what my answer means.

Questions to help you live out this talk:

1. How often does the topic of sex come up in our family conversation? When our children ask questions, what is my attitude about answering them?
2. Do our children know my moral views and do they understand why I hold them? How open am I when our child questions my values?
3. How often do our children see me being affectionate with my spouse? How affectionate am I with our children? Is there a routine about my affectionate behavior with our family?
4. How affectionate are our children with us, their brothers and sisters and their friends?
5. Do our children know we share a special relationship as husband and wife? Do we ever tell them how much our love for one another means and how it affects our love for them?
6. How has dialogue helped us discover our attitudes about sex? How has discussion encouraged us to change these attitudes?
7. Am I aware of our children's need to talk to me? Do I give each child time and a welcome atmosphere in which to talk? How do I respond when I know our child has something troubling him, but doesn't come to me to talk?

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION - A KEY TO STAYING IN RELATIONSHIP.

I. Introduction:

Tonight we are going to look at the subject of forgiveness. Forgiveness is my decision to heal a relationship. Forgiveness does not mean that I agree with, condone, or support your actions, but rather that I decide to love you as you are. Forgiveness cannot be assumed - it must be spoken. Feelings of embarrassment and shame indicate a need to ask forgiveness. Feelings of resentment, bitterness and anger indicate a need to be forgiving. Forgiveness is the sacrament of reconciliation when it is administered by a minister. In the first part of tonight's presentations we are going to examine forgiveness of self and in the second part, the forgiveness of others.

II. Forgiving yourself

Forgiving myself is the essence of accepting myself. It is not that I approve of everything that I am or I do, but rather that I accept myself with my strengths and my weaknesses.

When I can forgive myself and accept myself, I actually free myself to be me. I give myself permission to be who I am. (Share a time when you found it difficult to forgive yourself and the reason for it. Emphasize the feelings you had during your struggle.)

III. Sharing question: When did you have a hard time forgiving yourself and why do you think this happened?

IV. Forgiving others

Forgiveness is a key for staying in relationship. When we forgive someone, we please that person and ourselves from our own grudge. When true forgiveness takes place, peace is established in the relationship. The goal of forgiveness is to put us back in relationship with one another. Don't ask for forgiveness for feelings. Ask forgiveness for the behavior that flows out of the feelings. Forgiveness is a gift of love. It cannot be earned. (Share a time when the healing power of forgiveness allowed a loving relationship to be re-established and how that made you feel.)

V. Sharing question: Have you been able to make the decision to forgive and heal a relationship?

VI. Dialogue question: My decision to forgive you is an act of love for you. HDTMMF?

VII. Scripture: Matthew 18: 21-22

Some dialogue questions to help in preparation:

1. When am I afraid to ask forgiveness? HDIFSTWY?
2. When do I accept forgiveness from others? HDTMMF?
3. Do I accept God's forgiveness? HDIFSTWY?

FORGIVENESS: WHAT IS IT?

We should distinguish between "genuine" and "false" forgiveness. Genuine forgiveness flows from the attitude: "I forgive you because I have hurt others (and perhaps you) in comparable ways. Consequently, I can understand how someone could hurt another--either through ignorance, lack of sensitivity, or maliciousness born of weakness and fear'.

FALSE kinds of forgiveness are:

- (a) SELFISH FORGIVENESS, which is based on the attitude: "I forgive you because good Christians forgive those who hurt them, and I want to view myself as a good Christian"; or "I forgive you because I can't stand the anxiety caused by your being distant from me."
- (b) MANIPULATIVE FORGIVENESS: This attitude says: "I'll forgive you if you promise to make it up to me in some way". For example, a husband says to his wife: "I'll forgive you for forgetting to pick me up at work, if you let me go golfing tomorrow instead of taking you and the kids to the beach."
- (c) HOSTILE FORGIVENESS is seen in an attitude such as: "I forgive you, you poor thing, because I realize that you have not reached the same pinnacle in life as I, so you couldn't really understand what you have done"...or... "I forgive all sinners, including you."

FORGIVING IS A PROCESS, and THE DEEPER THE HURT, THE LONGER THE PROCESS. True forgiveness is not simply a matter of "shaking hands and making up". Forgiving a deep hurt may require feeling and talking with the offender over a period of a year or two before one feels a sense of completeness about the process,

ONE GREAT OBSTACLE TO FORGIVING ANOTHER is one's reluctance to forgive himself for past transgressions. If, deep down, we fail to forgive ourselves, it is unlikely we shall be able to forgive others. It is more realistic and healthy to realize that all of us are capable of doing great and that, in an average lifetime, we will hurt more than a few people some of them deeply.

ANOTHER OBSTACLE to forgiving another is that deep down we really don't want to forgive. When we say: "I can't forgive you," we are often saying: "I don't want to forgive you." There are at least four reasons for not totally wanting to forgive another:

- (a) If we forgive someone who has hurt us, it re-establishes them on an equal footing.
- (b) When we are still harboring a good deal of resentment, we may want to make the offender suffer as much as we did.
- (c) If we forgive someone who has hurt us, it brings us closer, and that's exactly what we may not want, because we don't wish to be that vulnerable again.
- (d) As long as we withhold forgiveness, we don't have to examine the possibility that we contributed to the problem and may have been partially to blame for the hurt eventually perpetrated on us.

FINALLY, we should realize that forgiving someone, especially one who has hurt us deeply and often, is perhaps the most difficult thing for a human being to do. While the Christian ideal is to forgive a person even "seven times a day", in reality this may not be possible for a particular person under specific circumstances.

THE LOST SON: FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION

REPORT CARD

Directions: Using your own definition of forgiveness, describe and grade yourself in the following areas. Use A, B, C, D, etc.

_____ Forgiving others in your family

_____ Forgiving others outside of your-family

_____ Specific acts of forgiveness you have performed

_____ Forgiving others and forgetting

Share your report card.

Directions: Consider these questions one at a time. Jot down some notes on your responses.

1. What is the first word you think of when you hear the word FORGIVENESS? What does forgiveness mean to YOU?
2. If you were the LOST SON, would you have returned home? Why or why not?
3. If you were the father, how might you have responded to your son's return?
4. As you look at your life, are you more like the son who LEFT home or the son who STAYED home?
5. Think of the times you felt forgiven. What feelings did you experience?
6. Have you ever found it difficult to forgive another person? How do you deal with hurt and anger so that you are able to forgive another?

TRUST – THE KEY TO MARRIED LIFE

The opposite of trust is fear -- I don't trust you, therefore, I say "no" -- in sex, in sharing feelings, and in listening to you. When I'm not trusting, I stay uninvolved with you because I fear your reaction.

Parallels Between Sex and Conversation

In general, women will engage in conversation for the satisfaction of talking -- just to talk. A woman's approach to sex on the other hand is that sex should be meaningful; it should be a deep, more purposeful experience.

In general, a man will engage in sex just for the pleasure of sex -- just to enjoy. What's more, to them, conversation should be important -- have some meaning or a purpose.

I. Must trust be earned by your husband/wife?

- A. Wife - Do I trust you with my body? If I did, then I wouldn't say no.
- B. Husband - Do I trust that what you have to say is Important? If I did, then I would listen to you.

II. There are other areas where our relationship lacks trust. Some of these areas could include:

- A. Raising children
- B. Finances
- C. God
- D. Death

III. To Trust is a Decision.

How do you plan to enrich your relationship by trusting more? How will this affect our relationship with God?

IV. Dialogue Question: HDIF when I doubt your trust?

V. Sharing Question: Share a time when you were able to trust your spouse,

VI. Scripture: Matthew chapter 6: 25-34.

SHARE THE JOYS OF PREPARING THIS PRESENTATION!!
BE YOURSELVES

GIFT OF HEALING

This month's presentation is on the Gift of Healing and what effect it has on our daily lives. Healing is a gift from God. It's not easy to make ourselves vulnerable. The Gift of Healing helps us to love more freely and affects our relationship with each other and those around us.

I. How does the way I see myself prevent me from being healed?

- A. Husband / Wife share.
- B. Give specific examples.

II. How does dialogue keep us open to be healed?

III. In what specific ways (either in dialogue or as a result of dialogue) have we reached beyond our hurt to each other?

- A. Nonverbal (touch, look, body language, etc.)
- B. Verbal. (Husband/wife each give one specific example.)
- C. Share closeness achieved as a result of healing.

IV. How does the closeness make us aware of God in our lives?

Give everyday examples.

V. Dialogue Question: Dialogue keeps us open to healing each other. How does this statement make me feel?

VI. Sharing Question: Share with us ways you try to reach out to one another.

VII. Scripture: Matthew Chapter 5: 21-25.

Suggested Questions to be given after sharing has ended:

- 1. Which one of us usually takes the initiative in keeping the peace and HDMAMMF?
- 2. HDIF after we have made-up?
- 3. HDIF when I make you laugh?

PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL YOUR JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF GIVING A
PRESENTATION.

BE YOURSELVES

SACRIFICE

At this time of year, we are especially aware of the supreme sacrifice the Jesus Christ made for all of us. This presentation is meant to help us focus on what sacrifices we are willing to take for the sake of our relationship.

I. What does sacrifice mean to me? (Husband/Wife share. Give specific examples.)

II. Sacrifice is a part of our relationship. Share specific examples of times when we've experienced this to be true,

- A. Times when I've been able to sacrifice myself for my spouse.
- B. Times when I haven't been able to sacrifice myself for my spouse.

III. How does our dialogue strengthen our desire to sacrifice for the sake of our relationship? (Give specific instances.)

IV. How does our dialogue enable us to give more of ourselves to others?

- A. Family
- B. Friends
- C. Community
- D. Church

V. Dialogue Question: HDIF when I know you've given up something for the sake of our relationship?

VI. Open Sharing Question: Would you share with us what sacrifice means to you in your relationship?

VII. Scripture: Matthew 19: 16-22.

Suggested Questions For Dialogue:

1. What is the meaning of Lent to me? HDIFAT?
2. HDIF when I am asked to sacrifice something for our relationship?
3. HDIF when you make a sacrifice for me?

BE YOURSELVES

HOW COME WE DON'T TALK ABOUT DEATH?

It is common knowledge that the majority of us do not dialogue on or discuss death to any great extent unless we are faced with a serious illness, a fair shot to the area if we "close call." We often judge that we have given a fair shot to the area if we find ourselves experiencing an emotional, tear-jerking dialogue or if we simply fall into one another's arms, speechless and holding on for dear life.

The truth of the matter is that dialogue in its intimacy and closeness will result in change. We are not simply trying to "feel" close, emotional, moved, or experiencing feelings that we think we probably will have if death were actually at our doorstep.

Focusing on the of death is meant to get us to take a hard look at how we are live our lives with one another today and to help us value the blessings of each new day, filled with opportunities to love each other. This talk is about how we live, not how we are going to die, or cope with being alone, or how we will spend eternity.

The hope is that facing into death and the separation it causes will create an awareness of our need and value for each other. The primary thrust of this is to get them to want to talk about death so that it can motivate them to make changes in their lives. We want them to see how vital it is to make their love come alive today. So, avoid making this morbid. It should be alive and motivational. Avoid placing too much emphasis on the changes we have made rather than on our desire to be more for our spouse.

OUTLINE

I. Attitudes - their origin, ones commonly possessed, and our fears. (Careful - be brief.)

A. Share how attitudes are and were formed.

1. Experiences of death in childhood.
2. Observations of others' reactions.
3. Influences of modern world.

B. Share personal attitudes.

C. Share common fears you have. (Incorporate personal fears and stress the reality of fears present in each of us.)

(It might be effective for one of you to begin by sharing your childhood experiences and influences of the modern world on the development of your attitudes. The other could on common attitudes most of us have, including his or her own personal ones. (i.e., "I see death as just about the worst thing that happens to us!") Both might then share their fears stressing the reality of the fears that exist in each of us.

HOW COME WE DON'T TALK ABOUT DEATH? (cont'd)

II. How attitudes affect our everyday behavior, thus having a strong influence on our relationship.

In this section, each of you should share one or two personal behaviors that clearly indicate how we are avoiding living relationship today. The behavior such as complacency, taking each other for granted, fear of getting too close, lack of establishing priorities, should illustrate how I live as if I will always have a tomorrow. When I get older, will I be able to say, "I loved you with all the talents that God gave me" or will I say, "I wish I had more time!"?

III. Motivation to face into area of death in our relationship - the value of loving our spouse more today.

In this section we want to motivate the couples to face into the painful area of death. Share the closeness you may have experienced in sharing these feelings. Let them see how much more alive your love for one another has been when you have felt needed by your spouse. To love your spouse more requires changes. Share the joy you have experienced by making those changes. Death is just one more area we fear facing, partly because it will require me to make changes in the ways I love you today. (Make this alive and motivational, not morbid.)

IV. CONCLUSION: Personal sharing of where you are with getting into this area (right now) and plans to begin dialogue, discussion, and re-evaluation enabling you to begin or continue with those plans.

- A. Live this area before you begin to write the talk. Be involved with one another and just be your honest and beautiful selves. You are not supposed to have it "all together" in this section. Your effort is your gift to each other and to those in attendance.
- B. The purpose is to level with those attending on "how far we each have to go", but to show our willingness to be for each other in a way by developing a concrete plan for facing into death, or how we live together now. An honest sharing of your own reluctance to enter or continue in this area, but a way to approach it and stay with it will be the best support you can give to them. In developing this section, be careful not to sound like you've got your act completely together, or being too rigid in your plan (giving them an impossible goal to shoot for), not being direct enough in your own plans, or having all the answers, And please, don't go about writing an intellectual dissertation on this area.

V. Dialogue Question: What value do I see in dialoguing on death? HDIFSTWY?

VI. Open Sharing

OUR COUPLENESS -- OUR GIFT TO THE CHURCH

To bring about an awareness of our place in the church as a couple, To help show our importance and place in the building and strength within our own church, as well as the strengthening of the United Methodist faith as a whole,

I. What does our coupleness mean to us? (Define in your words and feel this oneness.)

II. Share where you are since your weekend in experiencing each other.

Was your weekend important to your coupleness? How and Why?

III. Share very personally your being able to live out the gift of your coupleness to your church.

A. Ephesians 5 - share your personal insights on this.

B. Share your feelings on sharing your gift of "US" with the church.

IV. Share struggles that keep you from being the couple you want to be in your church.

A. Job

B. Outside of church involvements, etc.

V. How we share our coupleness with our pastor.

A. Are we encouraging him to support us?

B. Are we a threat or challenge to him?

VI. What works for us -- makes us a better couple? (Share personal examples.)

VII. Dialogue Question: What is the most difficult gift I have to give to the church?

HDMAMMF?

VIII. Sharing Question: How do you see your coupleness as a gift to the church?

TREATING GOD LIKE I TREAT YOU

The purpose of this talk is to show that growth in relationship with God happens is the measure there is growth in your relationship with your spouse.

While writing and giving this talk, you should be more concerned with the flaws, lack of growth, slow growth in your relationship with each other than you are uncomfortable and ashamed of the flaws, etc., in your relationship with God; that is where the couples should be after your presentation.

Do not set out to write parallels. They will be obvious. Do not try to match details. You will find that when there is freshness, newness, enthusiasm in your relationship with each other, it is going to be there in your relationship with God. When there is no change, little change, quite some change in your relationship with each other, there will be also no, little, or quite some change in your relationship with God. You will find out that "praying" is not the same as relationship

Do not compare before the weekend and now. You might want to start with what happened on the weekend and what happened since then. Remember, where you were at a certain point after your weekend is not bad versus where you are now, but (hopefully) where you are now is definitely a growth. About where you are now, you can honestly say, "We have only just begun".

I. Talk in a very honest way about what kind of relationship you have with God: provider, work-relationship, father, lawgiver, someone you have to please, someone to whom you are important, someone who is interested in you, understands you, listens to you, someone who has definite expectations about you, etc. You will find that there is one, which is kind of predominant, but that at certain times and, in certain situations, you approach God differently (can be very revealing!).

- A. What are the qualities in God that are the most attractive to you and to which your thoughts and attention go first of all?
- B. When you think about or speak about God, what are your feelings?
- C. In what situations of life do you turn to God more easily?
- D. In what situations of life do you hesitate to turn to Him?

(Use relatable examples. Don't try to impress people.)

II. What kind of relationship do the two of you have?

- A. What are the qualities you appreciate most in each other?
- B. What are your feelings when you think or speak about your spouse?
- C. In what situations of life do you turn to your spouse more easily?
- D. In what situations do you hesitate to turn to him/her?

(Use daily life examples from your kitchen, bedroom, living room, etc.)

TREATING GOD LIKE I TREAT YOU (cont'd)

III. Relate a recent example of progress in an area of your relationship.

How did that affect the way you treat or treated each other? Show what influence that had on your relationship with God,

IV. Dialogue Question: What change will I make the next two weeks in the way I treat you?
HDMAMMF?

V. Sharing Question: What change did I make the last two weeks in the way I treated you and how has that affected my relationship with God?

WHEREVER YOU GO, I WILL GO

I. OPENING PRAYER:

II. TRANSITION: We're all so busy with everyday life, it's important that we all slow down and be still. Tonight we are going to slow down and take a little time for our relationship with our spouse and our God. We're going to play a song now. One phrase I really enjoy is: "Be still and wait on the Spirit of the Lord and know that He is God." You may want to close your eyes. Visualize if you will, that God is speaking to you right now.

III. Song: Slow Down by Chuck Girard

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Wu4Ux6WpFg>

IV. Scripture Reading: Tonight, we are going to focus on our relationship with our spouse and God. First we are going to read a passage from Ruth, then listen to another song, write our ten and ten, and then have an open sharing question

The passage we are going to read from is from Ruth. It is the story of how Ruth and Naomi, Ruth's mother in law, stuck together after their husbands had been killed in battle. Naomi had tried to talk Ruth into going back to her home land, but Ruth was adamant, she was going -to stay with her new family. This passage which we are going to read now, also speaks directly to us and our relationship with our spouse.

READ RUTH 1:15-18

V. Song: Wherever You Go I Shall Go

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGn3uENUEec>

Picture our Lord standing in front of you and your spouse right now. Maybe the three of you are standing on the beach or in the mountains. He is reaching out His hands to you saying "We (the 3 of us) will be together forever, and our love will be the gift of our life."

VI. DIALOGUE QUESTION: As you consider your relationship with your spouse and God right now, how do the words, "We will be together forever, and our love will be the gift of our lives" make you feel? Write to your spouse.

VII. OPEN SHARING QUESTION: Share how God has touched your relationship.

THE COMPETITIVE CHRISTIAN

Competition is in the world to stay, it would appear. From the earliest days with Eve trying to be better than God, to our little ones fighting over a toy, competition has been alive. Some people thrive on competition, others put up with it or ignore it, and still others are crushed by it and avoid it. Many people are in competition with themselves to give more today than they gave yesterday (and whatever they give is not enough). Other people, at other times, have to fight to be recognized as an individual. Other people find challenge and/or self-love through competition, at the job, in the neighborhood, or through their kids' competition in sports or in other activities.

Competition is ingrained in most of us. How many of us have survived thus far without being compared to someone else by ourselves or by someone else? It affects me and how I am in our marriage. I compete for supremacy and for recognition. Competition can motivate one to become more of who he is. It can stimulate talents, qualities, abilities, and skills. And so competition can be good and it can be very harmful.

The goal here should be to share with the people who come to hear you about competition in your lives, the early awareness of it, the effects it had on you as children and young adults, in school, at home, in the activities and occupation you chose. The bulk of the sharing should be about where competition exists in your relationship with yourself, your spouse, and your children and how it affects and determines the choices you make in your lives. The goal is not to bad-mouth or praise or defend competition. The goal is merely to look at how it affects your life as a matrimonial couple.

I. Competition in me.

Share with the couples the competitive attitudes and beliefs that you bring to your relationship. Develop this from your youth through your adult years. Tell them how it has affected you, how it appears as part of your mask; e.g., the good guy is non-competitive, the doer is better than anyone else, etc.

II. Competition in our relationship.

Share the competition in your lives: sex, money, relatives, children (their love), and others, stake and married singles. The areas where I keep score are some of the ones where I compete; share not only the areas but its effect. What barriers has competition prevented from coming down?

III. Competitive effect in our family.

In this part of the presentation, share with the couples how you have transmitted your attitudes and beliefs to your children. How has it benefited and / or hurt them? So often we use competition to develop our potential, so we share both the good and bad aspects. Answer for yourselves and also ask the couples if it is necessary for the parental self-image to have the children successful in competitive activities: sports, grades, other activities.

THE COMPETITIVE CHRISTIAN (cont'd)

IV. Do I compete for God's love?

Share how competition within ourselves forms a barrier to our relationship with God. We strive to do good for Him, follow the rules, pray, do good for our neighbor. How much is real and how much is it in hopes that He'll reward you with the first prize? (One or both may or may not share.)

V. Competition in our church.

Share with them the effects of competition in the church or community. Do we strive to be noticed on our block, in our church? Does the recognition cause us to exclude certain activities, people that our Father has given to us to minister to because we are focused on more important things? Don't we all want to be able to say we're good friends of the pastor or that we have this pastor or that pastor for dinner?

Are we better Christians than other Christians? Are there people in our church that we classify as unfortunates?

(These sections could be shared as a complete package, if you choose, rather than section by section.).

VI. DIALOGUE QUESTION: (Select one)

1. What is one area in our lives where I know I am in competition with you? HDIFAMA?
2. What is one area in our lives where I know you are in competition with me? HDIFAT?
3. What in me encourages/discourages competition in our relationship? HDIFSTWY?
4. What in you encourages/discourages competition in our relationship? HDIFSTWY?

VII. SHARING QUESTION: How are we competitive as Christians and how does that affect our relationship?

FOLLOW ME

I. Introduction

Start by just indicating to the circle that tonight you would like to play a song for them, and without any further introduction play John Denver's "Follow Me", from his album "Take Me To Tomorrow".

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOxZOcr2WTk>

II. Read the Following Story. (Divide it so that both husband and wife read parts of it.)

When Jesus came to Jerusalem, a crowd gathered, and Christ said He needed couples to help Him, as the Apostles could never cover all the towns in the length of time He had left. As we stood there we whispered to one another "He's looking at us. He's going to choose us. Wow, isn't this wonderful?" And, as Christ's eyes darted across the crowd, they rested on us, and He called us by name. "Come," he said, "I need your help." And as we were coming forward, smiling and happy, and as the crowd parted for us to walk toward Him, we were no longer in Jerusalem. We were right here and now. We said to Christ, "We are so happy you chose us. Jesus, we promise you we will really work hard for you this week to help spread your love and word." And He looked at us and said, "I wasn't asking for a week, I was asking for... ("Oh, I know", I said, "a month."). He looked and shook His head (I said, "A year?"). He said, "No, I am asking for a lifetime." We said, "Jesus, you have the wrong persons. Maybe you should choose Jane and Joe up the block. I mean, they kind of need it more than we do." And He looked at us with those beautiful, never shifting eyes and said, "I have chosen you." And we said, "Jesus, look, tell the group You made a mistake and then we can..." He said, "Everyone has gone home, and they left thinking you will help me and them. We started to panic, and I said, "Lord, you know how I am on rejections, and" He said, "Oh, I know, it was hard on me too, especially when they spat upon me, cursed me, and I really could have used those Band-Aids for my bruised head. The kind you use when you pick a rose and it pricks your finger. I know the feeling well of what you are telling me, as I, too, went to my father and told Him, 'Who needs this?'" And He said, "The world needs this." And I looked around me in despair to their closed ears and their clenched fists and the defiant tongues, and questions, "My life for this? For them? I don't even know them."

"Christ," we said, "we cannot do it. You have asked too much of us, if we believe, we can take care of ourselves." He sort of smiled and placed a hand on each of our shoulders.

"Look," he said, "I am the light and if they believe in me, they will live forever. Could you know this and not share it with them?" "But Jesus, our relationship will hurt many times. We will argue between us and want not to do this anymore."

"I know," he said, "but I have given you the answer. When you truly be in My Father and in Me, and let us help you do it our way, the peace I gave the Apostles will be given to you and all you have to do is ask me. But ask me with a free soul, with no gain for yourselves, with no strings attached, with love in your heart, and I will never fail you."

"But Jesus," I said, as He started to walk away. He turned, and with tears in His eyes and with a look which I almost took for giving in to us to take away the life He asked of us, He said, "I have chosen you and no one can ever change that. All of you are Apostles whose names shall only be known to me."

FOLLOW ME (cont'd)

III. Play the Song Again.

Following the reading, without making any further comment, play the song again. Then tell the couples that you have a dialogue question for them.

IV. Dialogue Question: WAMF about us as a couple as I hear the words to this song?

V. Open Sharing: After everyone dialogues on this question, and they have all returned to the Circle, ask the couples if they would share with feelings about hearing the words "FOLLOW ME."

Note: We think that this is a beautiful presentation. One couple shared recently that it was like a picture that you looked at and saw one way and then looked back again and saw something entirely different. When the song is played the second time following the reading, the words sound entirely different. Hearing Christ speaking these words is a beautiful experience.

WARM FUZZY PROGRAM

Before the Flame make enough bags to give one to each person. Include in each bag pieces of paper with suggested Fuzzys such as: special phone calls, cards or gifts; doing a chore, etc.

PRESENTATION NIGHT:

I. Read “A Warm and Fuzzy Fairy Tale” to the group

II. Dialogue Question: Tell of a time when my spouse did something nice for me.

III. Sharing Question: Tell about a warm fuzzy you have given and the results.

IV. Pass out the Warm Fuzzy bags

Ask that they share with each other on any special feelings they have while giving away their Warm Fuzzys.

A WARM AND FUZZY FAIRY TALE

by: Claude M Stoiner *

Once upon a time, even longer than long ago, there lived a very warm and happy family; a father named Father, a mother named Mother, and their two adorable children, Brother and Sister. To appreciate how really warm and happy this family was, you have to understand how things were in those days. You particularly have to understand about the Warm Fuzzys.

It was the custom, then, to give every child, at birth, a wonderfully marvelous bag of their own. The bag was quite small and made of the softest, fuzziest material you could imagine. It never felt heavy or full, and yet anytime you put your hand inside, you would find a Warm Fuzzy there. Finding a Warm Fuzzy in your bag was just about the nicest feeling in the world. In fact, the feeling any nicer was when you gave your Fuzzy to someone else. Fuzzys were about the size of a little girl's hand, and while they came in many different colors, they were all equally soft and warm and fuzzy. When you took a Fuzzy out of your bag and gave it to someone else, it would smile a soft smile, sigh a deep sigh and blossom, right then and there, into a large shaggy, Warm Fuzzy, just the right size to put around a shoulder or lay in a lap. There, it would immediately snuggle up even closer and make you feel warm and fuzzy and good all over.

Getting plenty of Warm Fuzzys was important to everyone's well-being because without them you would gradually develop a sickness in your back which would cause you to shrivel up and die. There was little danger of that happening in those days, however because it was so easy to get Warm Fuzzys. Anytime someone felt like it, they could just walk up to you and say, "I'd like to have a Warm Fuzzy." You would then reach into your bag and give them one, and watch them smile and grow warm and fuzzy all over. Most of the time they would give you a Fuzzy in return, and you could grow warm and fuzzy together. Some people enjoyed giving away their Fuzzys, even when not asked. And everyone, in their own way, was equally free with their Fuzzys because there were always plenty to go around. No matter how often or how fast you reached into your bag, you always found another Fuzzy. Because of this, everyone could feel warm and fuzzy anytime they wanted to, and it was easy for them to stay happy all of the time.

Or at least until the old Witch moved into the neighborhood! She came in an old rusty wagon, intent of selling her magic health potions and enchanted happiness salves. But, as you can imagine, everyone was too happily warm and fuzzy to care about her wares. This made her frustrated and angry. Being a clever old witch, she soon devised a devious plan. On the last truly happy morning, she found Father watching Mother who was busy playing with Daughter.

"Look, Father," whispered the witch in a voice that creaked like her own rusty wagon wheel, "look at Mother giving all her Fuzzys to Daughter. If she keeps that up much longer, her bag will run dry and there won't be any more for you." Father couldn't believe his ears. All of his life there had always been enough Fuzzys for everyone. "Do you mean to tell me the supply of Fuzzys is limited?" he asked. "Absolutely!" replied the witch. "It happened only last week to the people on the other side of the mountain, and it was dreadful to behold. The worst part is, you never know exactly when it will happen. One day you'll reach into your bag and there will be nothing there! And once your bag runs dry, that's it, forever! It won't be long before you'll be left to shrivel up and die!" With that she hobbled away to her wagon, laughing and crackling at the trick she had pulled.

A WARM AND FUZZY FAIRY TALE (cont'd)

Father could hardly believe the witch's story at first, but it did make him fearful and suspicious. He decided to start counting every time Mother gave a Warm Fuzzy to someone else. The more she gave the more he counted and the more he worried, because he was particularly fond of Mother's Fuzzys, and he never wanted to be without them. Even if there was only a small chance that the witch told the truth, he didn't think it was right for Mother to spend all her Warm Fuzzys on the children and other people. He began to complain out loud whenever he saw Mother give a Fuzzy to someone else. Because Mother loved Father very much, and respected his wishes, she began withholding her Fuzzys from others, and reserved most of them for him. The children quickly noticed this change, and soon began to get the idea that it was wrong to give Fuzzys too freely. They too became suspicious and were very careful to count their own Fuzzys. They gave them less and less when asked, and almost never, just because they felt like it. They began to object whenever they felt Father and Mother were giving too many Fuzzys to each other.

Even though they still found a Fuzzy each and every time they reached into their bags, they worried more and more about the witch's rumor of limited supply, so they reached less and less. As this wicked idea began to spread throughout the neighborhood, everyone became more fearful and more stingy. The less they reached into their bags, the more scarce Warm Fuzzys became. Everywhere you went, people complained of feeling less fuzzy and more unhappy. Some even shriveled up and died. Many turned to the witch in desperation, and they bought large quantities of potions and salves, even though they didn't really work at all.

Now, the situation was becoming very serious indeed. If everyone shriveled up and died, there would be no more market for potions and salves, so the clever witch devised another devious plan. She gave everyone a brand new bag that looked just like the warm Fuzzy bag, except that it was cold and prickly. Whenever you reached inside the witch's bag, you found a Cold Prickly. Cold Pricklys didn't feel very good because they were lumpy and slimy like an old toadstool. When you gave one to someone else, it shriveled up into a small hard, spiny ball that made you feel cold and prickly all over. This didn't make people happy, but it did keep them from shriveling up and dying, so the neighborhood began to accept Cold Pricklys as being better than nothing at all.

At first this created a lot of confusion. Some trusting people would still give a Warm Fuzzy when asked, only to get a Cold Prickly in return. They soon learned their lesson, however, and it wasn't long before you could see the sad sight of two old friends asking each other for Warm Fuzzys, but getting only Cold Pricklys. As a result, fewer people were actually dying, but practically nobody was smiling, and absolutely everybody knew how badly it felt to be cold and prickly. The situation was further complicated by the virtual disappearance of Warm Fuzzys. Even though you could still find one anytime you reached into your warm fuzzy bag, people were too afraid they might be feeling the last one. So, they used their cold prickly bags almost exclusively. This made Warm Fuzzys very scarce and valuable. People would do almost anything to get one.

Some heartless people even went so far as to disguise some of their Cold Pricklys to make them look like Warm Fuzzys, which they in turn sold at dear prices to people who still cared enough to give a Fuzzy, but were too afraid to reach into their own bag for one.

A WARM AND FUZZY FAIRY TALE (cont'd)

These people would then exchange their imitations, alternately known as False Fuzzys or Plastic Pricklys, in the anticipation of feeling warm and fuzzy again. When instead they continued to feel cold and prickly, they became confused and more afraid than ever to involve themselves with Warm Fuzzys under any conditions.

At this dismal point in time another stranger moved into the neighborhood. Unlike the ugly old witch who caused all the trouble in the first place, this was a young woman with long golden hair, bright smiling cheeks and generous proportions that caused people to call her the Hip Woman. Having no knowledge of the witch and her scheme, the Hip Woman was not the least bit worried about running out of Fuzzys. She gave them out freely, even when not asked, but mostly to the children, because they were the only ones left who were not afraid of getting a Cold Prickly by mistake. The parents were shocked by this unexpected show of generosity and they strongly disapproved of the Hip Woman's influence. The children liked her very much, however, because they always felt warm and fuzzy and happy around her. It wasn't very long before they had developed the habit of handing out Fuzzys whenever they felt like it. Their cold and prickly parents quickly passed a law making it a crime to pass out Warm Fuzzys in a free and reckless manner.

The law, they said, was designed to protect the children from the danger of running out of Fuzzys too soon, and thus dooming themselves to a long lonely life of felling cold and prickly, or worse, shriveling up and dying. A few people thought the law was really designed to protect the parents from the frustration of feeling old and prickly while their children were felling young and Fuzzy, but they didn't say it out loud very loudly. So the law came to pass and the witch was deputized to enforce it. Mostly, however, the Hip Woman and the children ignored all the fuss and continued to give their Warm Fuzzys whenever and wherever they felt like it, and always when asked.

Because there were so many children and only one witch, she found it impossible to enforce the law and tend to her wagon at the same time. Which brings our story right up to this very minute and leaves us with questions yet to be answered:

- Will the adult forces of law and order be able to stop the dangerous generosity of the children?
- Will the parents take a chance on joining their children and thus bring back the days of original happiness?
- Will the wicked witch go out of business and take her wagon full of Cold Pricklys elsewhere?
- Is the supply of Warm Fuzzys really unlimited, or will it run out someday as the witch claims?

We'll have to wait for the future to bring us the answer, but in the meantime, if someone should ask you for a Warm Fuzzy, take a chance on giving one and see what happens... even if that someone looks like a mean old witch! ...and everyone will live happily.

The End.

*The name Claude M. Steiner appeared on the manuscript upon which this tale was based. We have been unable to locate Dr. Steiner or to trace the origin of the original story. We have reproduced this version of it, without his permission, with the conviction that he has enough Warm Fuzzys in his own bag to share this with us.

REMEMBER WHEN

We used to laugh, we used to giggle, we used to tease, we used to make love.

Years ago we laughed because three days before payday our gas tank was empty and we coasted into a gas station and combined our last two quarters to buy fifty cents worth of gas, and it was so funny.

Then yesterday we wanted to laugh, but it was three days before payday and the gas and the power and the light bills were due, the children needed lunch money and the gas tank was empty and it wasn't funny at all.

Years ago, we giggled because it was noon we heard our neighbors telling the mailman that he should knock a little louder and wait a few more minutes at our door because we were newlyweds and spent a lot of our time in bed. Even though it was embarrassing, it was hilarious.

Then yesterday we wanted to giggle, but two of our children were arguing and the phone was ringing and the potatoes were boiling over, and it wasn't hilarious,

Years ago we used to tease..... I teased him to make believe that I thought every girl who set eyes on him found him irresistible as I did, and he teased me because, without his explanations, I'd never understand a joke, and we delighted in it.

Then yesterday, we wanted to tease, but my voice was tinged with sarcasm and jealousy as I realized that many young girls that I did not know greeted him warmly, and his voice was tinged with ridicule about my sense of humor and we both hurt.

Years ago we used to joke because he was getting bald, and I'd tell him he was wearing it out on the headboard, and held pat my fanny and tell me that even though I was getting older, I was getting better, and we both felt loved.

Then Yesterday we wanted to joke but I was giving, him a haircut and I complained because I couldn't cover up all the bald spots and when he went to pat my fanny I said, "For Pete's sake, the kids are looking", and we felt so alone.

Years ago, we used to make love because God's sunshine filled our hearts and warmed our inner selves, and because we became whole-and complete.

Then yesterday, we wanted to make love, but one child had a nightmare and another had a fever and was wandering around getting drinks or going to the bathroom, and after that we both fell asleep . . . and we felt a loss.

But today, we learned to laugh, we learned to giggle, we learned to tease, and we learned to joke and we learned to make love. TODAY we came to Marriage Encounter and we discovered US. We discovered how important we are. God loved us enough to send us each other and those precious moments to laugh, giggle, tease, joke and make love are gifts we are going to give ourselves, no matter how demanding the world may ever become again. Nothing else is as important as our marriage, and with God's help, we will laugh, giggle, tease, joke and make love.

365 TIMES

Dear Louise:

During the last year I have tried to seduce you 365 times. I have succeeded only 36 times. That is an average of once every 10 days.

The following is a list of reasons why I didn't succeed more often:

- ✓ Too tired - 32 times
- ✓ Still need to dialogue - 27 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Rap/Board - 26 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Coordinators meetings - 10 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Renewal - 4 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Homecoming/Welcome back - 4 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Executive Committee Meeting 8 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Team meetings - 12 times
- ✓ Out too late - attending Information Nights - 6 times
- ✓ Out too late - having talks workshopped - 14 times
- ✓ Out too late - hosting Weekend - 6 times
- ✓ Out too late - making banners - 6 times
- ✓ Telephone ringing - 44 times
- ✓ Typing talks till 2:00 a.m. - 8 times
- ✓ Fell asleep at supper table - 4 times
- ✓ Talks to write - 23 times
- ✓ Talks to re-write - 44 times
- ✓ Went to bed angry after writing talks - 12 times
- ✓ Fell asleep in the car while driving home - 14 times
- ✓ Baby-sitting kids all weekend - 6 times
- ✓ Visiting M.E. couple asleep in the next room - 6 times
- ✓ Fell asleep dialoguing - 13 times

TOTAL: 329 times

During the 36 times I did succeed, the activity was not entirely satisfactory because:

- ✓ Interrupted by telephone calls – 19 times
- ✓ I tried to talk on the telephone at the same time – 7 times
- ✓ You couldn't remember how to do it – 3 times
- ✓ I had to wake you up to tell you we were through – 7 times

Honey, it's no wonder we never have any original material to write Areas For Reaching Out.

XXXX-0000

Your loving spouse,
Duane

PLEASE HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING

Don't be fooled by me,
Don't be fooled by the face I wear,
For I wear a mask, I wear a thousand masks,
masks that I'm afraid to take off,
and none of them are me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,
but don't be fooled, for God's sake don't be fooled.
I give you the impression that I'm secure,
that all is sunny and unruffled with me,
within as well as without,
that confidence is my name and coolness my game,
that the water's calm and I'm in command,
and that I need no one.

But don't believe me, please.
My surface may seem smooth, but my surface is my mask,
my ever-varying and ever-concealing mask.
Beneath lies no smugness, no complacency.
Beneath dwells the real me in the confusion, in fear, in aloneness.
But I hide this.
I don't want anybody to know it.

I panic at the thought of my weakness and fear being exposed,
That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,
a nonchalant, sophisticated facade, to help me pretend,
to shield me from the glance that knows.
But such a glance is precisely my salvation. My only salvation,
And I know it.

That is if it's followed by acceptance, if it's followed by love.
It can liberate me, from myself,
from my own self-built prison walls,
from the barriers that I so painstakingly erect.
It will assure me of what I can't assure myself,
that I'm really valuable.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare. I'm afraid to!
I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance and love.
I'm afraid you'll think less of me, that you'll laugh, and your laugh would kill me.
I'm afraid that deep-down I'm nothing, that I'm just no good,
and that you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my pretending games
with a facade of assurance without, and a trembling child within.
And so begins the parade of masks,
the glittering but empty parade of masks.
And my life becomes a front.

PLEASE HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING (cont'd)

I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.
I tell you everything that's really nothing,
and nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me.
So when I'm going through my routine do not be fooled by what I'm saying.

Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying,
what I'd like to be able to say, what- for survival I need to say,
but what I can't say.

I dislike hiding. Honestly.
I dislike the superficial game I'm playing.
I'd really like to be genuine and spontaneous, and me, but I need help.
I want you to hold out your hand
even when that's the last thing I seem to want, or need.
You can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare of the breathing dead.

You can call me into aliveness.
Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging,
each time you try to understand because you really care,
my heart begins to grow wings, very small wings, feeble wings, but wings.

With your sensitivity, and power of understanding,
you can breathe life into me. I want you to know that.
I want you to know how important you are to me, how you can help be a
creator of the person that is me if you choose to.

You can break down the wall behind which I tremble,
you can remove my mask,
you can release me from my shadow-world of panic
and uncertainty,
from my lonely prison.

Do not pass me by. Please do not pass me by.
It will not be easy for you.
A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls,
The nearer you approach to me, the blinder I may strike back.
It's irrational, but despite what the books say about man, I am irrational.
I fight against the very thing that I cry out for.

But I am told that
Love is stronger than strong walls, and in this lies my hope. My only hope.
Please try to beat down those walls with firm hands,
but with gentle hands -- for a child is very sensitive.
Who am I? I am someone you know very well.
For I am every man you meet and I am every woman you meet,
I am a person.

OPEN HOUSE

Everyone is coming to our party.
Everyone, that is except the Stones,
Who stopped being the Stones when she started saying that the trouble with America was the CIA and the FBI and the exploitation of the lettuce growers and Indians, and he started saying the trouble was not enough tennis courts, but Everyone else is coming to our party.

Everyone, that is except the Hoyts,
who stopped being the Hoyts when they started saying that just because a husband and wife are sexually unfaithful doesn't mean that they're being unfaithful emotionally,
but everyone else is coming to our party.

Everyone, that is, except the Kings,
Who stopped being the Kings when she decided that every time she told him something sensitive and deep, he didn't get it, but
Everyone else is coming to our party. .

Everyone, that is except the Youngs,
Who stopped being the Youngs when she started law school. And he started saying the house is never clean, And she started saying why don't you clean it yourself And he started saying that women should clean and men should go to law school, but
Everyone else is coming to our party.

Everyone, that is, except the Clarks,
Who stopped being the Clarks when she decided to seek inner peace through Gay Lib,
but everyone else is coming to our party.

Everyone that is except the Greens.
Who stopped being the Greens when they sold their house and moved to the country to rediscover each other, and rediscovered that they didn't agree about garlic, or Woody Allen. Or Scrabble, her father, cloth napkins, or psychoanalysis. Or when is the music so loud that it's giving you headaches. Or when is a room so ice cold that your fingers get numb, but everyone else is coming to our party.

I hope we'll be there.

This would be great for a presentation, with husband and wife reading alternating verses. Think up your own dialogue question.

RENEWING OUR DREAMS THROUGH CHANGE

We all began a beautiful dream on our weekend as we started to change for each other. As time goes on though, our dreams may have become cloudy. Have we stopped changing? This talk is about the decision to love and the decision to change that is necessary to revitalize our dream for each other.

I. What were our dreams on Sunday night of our weekend?

- A. Husband/Wife share their excitement for each other.
- B. Husband/Wife share their excitement for family.
- C. Husband/Wife share their excitement for community.

II. What caused our dreams to fade away since our weekend?

- A. Disillusionment or disappointment with myself.
- B. Disillusionment with each other, and others.
 - 1. Pressure from modern world (married singles activities)
 - 2. Dialogue becoming routing,
 - 3. Loneliness.

III. How have these examples led to complacency in our relationship?

- A. Attitude that closeness of feelings is not achievable.
- B. Attitude that closeness of relationship we attained on the weekend is not realistic on a daily basis.
- C. This is how I am; this is how we are (that's the way it is).

IV. To love is a decision.

It's more than a decision to love my spouse when I judge him/her as not lovable. Love is a decision to respond to my spouse not only in times of need, but every day. (Husband/Wife share on areas for change in their own lives.)

- A. If insensitivity hurts my spouse, I've got to change and become more sensitive.
- B. If my quietness causes us to be distant, then I have to change and share more.
- C. If my saying no in our sexual relationship hurts my spouse, I have to change and say yes.
- D. If I take my spouse for granted, I have to change and be more romantic.

V. Read As Is: The way that we recapture our dream is to respond to each other as we did on Sunday night. The way we respond is through our decision to change for the sake of my spouse.

VI. Dialogue Question: How am I willing to change for you? HDMAMMF?

VII. Sharing Question: Share with us how you are going to change to renew your dreams.

VIII. Scripture Reading: John 2: 7-11.

OPEN AND CARING

This month's presentation is a call for us to be an OPEN AND CARING couple. This means our being thoroughly involved in the lives of others, as a couple, and showing to others their goodness and lovability. The couple is the greatest resource of the church, and by using our apostolate, our couple power, to actually reach out in love to others, we can change the world. It's up to us to be the apostles of today and spread our love through our coupleness.

I. In what ways do I show my spouse that he/she is loved and lovable? (Husband/Wife share -- simple, everyday examples.)

II. How does our dialogue help us to be open to each other?

III. Our openness to each other builds our coupleness. How do we use our coupleness to reach out to others?

- A. Family
- B. Community

IV. How do we see our coupleness as a resource of the church?

- A. Parish activities.
- B. Recruiting others for the weekend
- C. Marriage Encounter
- D. Other

V. Dialogue Question: What more can we do as a couple, to bring others to experience the weekend? HDMAMMF?

VI. Sharing Question: Would you share with us your excitement about changing the world through the weekend?

VII. Scripture: Matthew 28: 18-20.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended.)

1. When was the last time we recruited a couple? HDMAMMF?
2. HDIF when I know our coupleness has touched others?
3. Knowing the couple is the greatest resource of the church, how can we use our couple power in our parish? HDMAMMF?

LOVE LETTER

This presentation is on our Love Letter in our daily dialogue. The love letter is my gift to my spouse. It's a beautiful yet simple way to reach out to my spouse to share with him who I am and to bring a richness to our relationship,

I. What was my initial reaction about writing a love letter on our weekend? What is my reaction now? (Husband/Wife share)

II. Do we use our love letter to enhance our relationship?

- A. Prayer
- B. Specialness
- C. Focusing in on my spouse/or myself
- D. Am I enthusiastic/or complacent
- E. Sticking with feelings/garbage dumping
- F. Sharing myself/Manipulating

III. How does our dialogue make us more open in our relationship? (Share positive/negative)

- A. Makes us vulnerable
- B. Deeper awareness of spouse
- C. Non-verbal
- D. Attitude

IV. Dialogue Question: HDIF knowing that you are writing a love letter to me today?

V. Sharing Question: Would you share with us how you focus in on your spouse in your love letter?

VII. Scripture Reading: Matthew 13: 13-17.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

1. How does my self-image affect my love letter? HDMAMMF?
2. Dialogue is a gift from the Father. HDTMMF?
3. The most precious gift I can give my spouse is the gift of myself through my love letter. HDTMMF?

PLEASE SHARE JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF GIVING PRESENTATION.

BE YOURSELVES

MARRIAGE IN GOD'S PLAN THROUGH COUPLENES

The modern world's plan encourages us to think only of ourselves. When we think of ourselves, it is difficult to include anyone else, even our spouse. But God has a different plan for us. His plan for us is beautiful and simple. He wants us to strive to be a great couple.

I. How has my idea of coupleness changed since our weekend? (Husband/Wife share attitudes)

- A. Time spent together
- B. Money
- C. Jobs
- D. Other areas -- sex, children, possessions

II. In what ways do I strive to live out our coupleness each day?

- A. How do I live out our coupleness? Give everyday examples.
- B. How do we live out our coupleness?

III. How do we use our dialogue as a means of achieving this closeness in our coupleness?

IV. What affects does our coupleness have on our:

- A. Family
- B. Community

V. Share your reaction in knowing that being a great couple is God's plan for you.

VI. Dialogue Question: HDIF knowing that God wants us to be close to each other as a couple?

VII. Sharing Question: Share with us how you feel when you do something special as a couple. (Please ask couples to stick to feelings.)

VIII. Scripture: Ephesians 5: 21-33,

CHANGE THRU LOVE

Our weekend made us aware of a new way of life and we decided we would change certain things in our lifestyle. Change is a by-product of our dialogue. I change because I want to love my spouse more. I change in any area I see can enhance our relationship -- to love one another more fully. No area can be a closed subject if we desire to grow closer.

I. What changes have I made in myself because of our weekend? (Husband/Wife share)

- A. Work
- B. Activities

II. In what positive ways do I try to change my self-image?

- A. Thoughts (within myself)
- B. Actions (external, with others)

III. How do I try to change myself as a result of our dialogue?

- A. Listening
- B. Response to one another (decision to love or to be loved - behavior)
- C. Discussion

IV. Share a moment of closeness that you experienced as a couple as a result of your decision to change.

V. Dialogue Question: What change can I make in myself to enhance our relationship?
HDMAMMF?

VI. Sharing Question: Share with us the changes you can make to enhance your relationship.

VII. Scripture: Philippians 2: 5-9,

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

1. In what area do I find change most difficult? HDMAMMF?
2. HDIF when I know you have made an effort to change?
3. What changes can we make as a couple in order to bring God more into our relationship?
HDMAMMF?

WE ARE SPECIAL

I. OPEN WITH A PRAYER

II. PRESENT THE FOLLOWING OPEN SHARING QUESTIONS one at a time and encourage each couple to share on each as they feel moved.

1. Share with us your thoughts and feelings on WHEN YOU FIRST MET EACH OTHER.
2. Share with us your thoughts and feelings on your ENGAGEMENT,
3. Share with us your thoughts and feelings on your WEDDING DAY,

III. Play “Wedding Song” by Captain & Tenille, album “Song of Joy”.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNaJvIqnKRI>

IV. DIALOGUE QUESTION: Life is beautiful when it is shared with you! HDTMMF?

V. Open Sharing

LET'S STOP PLAYING GAMES

A lot of things in this article spoke to us. So we'd like to take the pertinent parts and substitute our names for theirs.

Beyond Understanding - To Unity (While We Can)

Donie: When we were in our 40's, it seemed like we lost a whole rash of friends to death. Ruth chose to ask for prayers. I thought to myself, "One of these days that'll be me asking for prayer. So that maybe somehow or another, God will grant Jim and me one more extra hour, one more day, one more week".

The record player was on and one of the lines from the song that was playing really tore me up. It went, "And these few precious days I'll spend with you. These precious days I'll spend with you." The tears came to my eyes not for Ruth and her husband but for Jim and me.

Because in reality, that's all we really do have, "these few precious days" and most of the time I sure don't treat them as though they and Jim were precious. I waste the opportunities we have and someday I know I will give just about anything short of my immortal soul to have some of them back again.

And so that night just about the time we were laying in each other's arms, the man died and I think in a way both of us sensed that. I've tried to talk about it. We tried to put into words the awareness we had that rarely are we properly appreciative of how we should treasure our love-making and each other and not take it or each other for granted. But we couldn't seem to say it all so we just ended up holding each other very tightly.

It's such a horrible shame that quite often those kinds of words that truly express how deeply we love one another only come when it's too late for the other person to hear them.

Each time Jim has to go away on a business trip or to the hospital, we each get a small taste of what it is going to be like to sleep alone in a bed that once was such a cozy refuge for two. We get a taste of what it's going to be like to not have someone near who wants to know what your feelings are on all the little things. We get a taste of what it's like to live out your mask to the hilt 16 to 18 hours a day because there isn't someone you trust enough to be completely candid and real with, who you know loves you, warts and all.

We've each had those moments when that cold fear of maybe something horrible happening to the other one sweeps over us and we end up praying "Oh God, keep him/her safe and just bring them home", and you'd think that after all of that we'd wake up and start living our lives together as the precious, time running-out-gift that they are. But we haven't. We still believe that it's never going to happen to us.

LET'S STOP PLAYING GAMES (cont'd)

Jim But time passes - life gets back to normal - death or separation seems remote. How often I forget that the clock is ticking. How many times I've walked right up to the threshold of a beautiful, painfully close moment of intimacy with Donie, then backed away from it. How many times all the pieces have been in place - two beautiful love-letters written and read, a quiet house, the atmosphere perfect, the feelings alive, and I gave only a halfhearted attempt at experiencing my wife through her feelings.

Unity is so elusive, especially when I'm not going after it with much enthusiasm. They told us about unity of feelings as the ultimate goal of dialogue on our weekend. They asked us to recall our three closest moments and then gave us the tool to create moments just as close if we worked at it, and we did especially in the early days.

We not only believed it was possible, we proved it to ourselves. Not often, mind you. But often enough to realize that it is possible to pursue Donie's feeling with such commitment that I can truly feel it inside myself, to be so close to Donie that I know exactly what it's like to be her at that moment. To love her so much that nothing is more important to me at that moment than to see the world through her eyes and feel it as she does.

I came home from our Weekend determined to make that crescendo kind of closeness our goal for each and every dialogue. For months I pursued that with a vengeance - working as hard as I knew how to experience Donie fully. But for the first few weeks I held back. I kept telling myself there was a "bag of snakes" inside me that I didn't want her to know about.

She kept after me until I started to reveal some of what I thought were "uglies" because I slowly became convinced that she really wanted to know. But they weren't uglies at all - they were very real fears and doubts about myself buried deep behind my mask. I began to let her share in them.

One Sunday morning in a scripture dialogue we worked so hard at reaching unity of feelings that our oneness became a moment that neither of us will ever forget. The presence of God was in that room with us. We were so close and the glow from that blending of our souls lasted for weeks. The memory will last forever.

We've come close to that a few times since then when we've cared enough to work for it. But we just haven't worked to pursue each other with every fiber that's in us. We've forgotten the ultimate goal of dialogue and settled for using it to better our understanding of ourselves and each other rather than to better our experience of each other,

I don't know how to define unity or intimacy on a practical basis, if I'm honest. I can talk a lot of good-sounding words, but for a lot of reasons this question has been bugging me for weeks, and the more I look at it, the more I realize I am afraid of unity and intimacy with Donie. The more I look the more I see all the ways I back away when an intimate opportunity presents itself.

LET'S STOP PLAYING GAMES (cont'd)

Donie: Recently I've found myself being unable to describe accurately in our dialogue very deep and painful feelings of hurt and longing. I'd get to a certain point and then reach a mental blank, I knew there was more there but I just couldn't seem to get at it.

After looking at myself, I realized that in these areas I had stopped trusting Jim beyond a certain point. That certain point being where the feeling would start to truly come alive in me and become so obvious to Jim that I couldn't bluff my way out of it. The reasons why I stopped believing in him are really kind of irrelevant right now. What is important for me to deal with is the fact that I'm sometimes not as open to Jim as I once was.

At least before and shortly after our Weekend, I knew the specifics of what I was afraid to tell Jim. There are times now when I get so bound up, I'm not even willing to acknowledge the feelings to myself. That isn't exactly what you'd call progress. And more importantly it's the biggest hurdle I can see to us fully appreciating our "right nows" as these few precious days".

Sitting down to think about unity of feelings has been good for us. It's caused us to recall what it takes to experience that unity for ourselves. It takes determination and absolute commitment. I have to want it enough to go after Jim with every ounce of commitment that's in me. To set myself aside completely, and become an empty vessel ready to be filled up by her. To die to myself.

I have to make full use of my imagination and creativity to conjure up images of Jim's description of what his feeling is like and know the right kinds of questions to ask.

It takes the most intense form of listening possible, and it takes both of us working as hard as we can. We get nowhere when one of us wants to experience the other's feeling, but the other doesn't want to share it fully. We sometimes seem to settle for understanding and trust starts to fade when we don't work very hard at experiencing each other.

Usually the old standard questions like "Can you think of a time when I felt like this?" or "How would you act it out if you could?" or "What increases your feeling?" or "How do I act when I feel like this?" help us to get to a fundamental level of understanding, and the problem is that once we get to this level of understanding, we tend to quit or lapse into a chat.

The fact is, it takes a tremendous amount of energy, concentration, and pure determination to dialogue for a full ten minutes. Ten minutes is a long, long time when we are focusing our full attention on trying to absorb one another completely.

Yet that intimacy we tell ourselves we're after comes only when I know Jim loves me enough to want to experience my feeling even after he understands it whatever the feeling is. I end up knowing I am being pursued, wanted, and desirable to him even if we never succeed in tasting the feeling. The closeness comes on the journey not just at the destination,

LET'S STOP PLAYING GAMES (cont'd)

Donie: Death of family or friends has had a good effect on us. We're trying harder to experience each other. We're reminding ourselves that all it takes is a decision and a little willpower, and what spurs us on is the knowledge that God gives me the gift of caressing his cheek today. He has allowed me to try to touch Jim's soul today - but he doesn't guarantee that gift for tomorrow. Mary Jean Irion said it a lot better than we ever could in this poem:

*"Let me be aware of the treasure you are.
Let me learn from you, love you, bless you - before you depart.
Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow.
Let me hold you while I may, for it will not always be so.
One-day I shall dig my fingers into the earth,
or bury my face in the pillow,
or stretch myself taut,
or raise my hands to the sky,
and want more than all the world
for your return."*

Dialogue Question: If this were my last opportunity what feelings would I want to share with you?

SHARING OUR FEELINGS ABOUT POSSESSIONS

The purpose of this talk is to show the couples that they can share their feelings about possessions without necessarily agreeing or reaching a conclusion or solving a problem about possessions. They should begin to understand that this is another area that is rich in feelings and can allow the couple to grow closer together instead of being an area that comes between them.

I. How I saw possessions in the past.

May want to include items such as: (give personal examples)

- A. How did I feel about buying a new car, a new home, new clothes, etc.?
- B. How did my possessions reflect myself and my self-image?
- C. How did my possessions reflect my mask?
- D. What were my feelings about my "personal possessions"? (i.e., my tools, my appliances, or equipment, etc.)
- E. How did I feel when others wanted to borrow something of mine?
- F. How did I feel if someone else abused my possession? (broke it, damaged it, or didn't return it to the proper place, etc.)
- G. How did I feel when I wanted something I didn't think we could afford?

II. What did I begin to learn about my feelings when we dialogued on possessions?

Include items such as: (whatever applies to you). Give personal examples.

- A. I didn't realize I was so proud of my possessions.
- B. I saw that I valued "things" more than I did people.
- C. I felt a reverse snobbery to find I didn't value possessions very highly.
- D. I was surprised to learn how closely possessions were/weren't tied to my mask.
- E. I was surprised to learn which possessions I had the strongest feelings about; they were/weren't the ones I thought were most important.
- F. The intensity of my feelings: shallow, light, or deep and strong.

III. Insights I gained to my spouse by dialoguing on possessions,

- A. I now understand my spouse's reaction to certain things (like if I borrow a hammer, scissors and don't return),
- B. New awareness of the depth of feelings about possessions or lack of certain possessions.

IV. Closeness we've reached as a couple because of sharing our feelings openly and honestly about possessions.

- A. Difficulty of finding feelings, having to search for deeper feelings under our surface feelings/joys when we did.
- B. The understanding, acceptance we gained for our spouse's feelings.
- C. Describe the closeness we felt when we were able to share on this difficult area.

V. DIALOGUE QUESTION: What inanimate possession do I value most? How do I feel sharing this with you? (May want to think what one item I'd save from our house if it were on fire.)

VI. SHARING QUESTION: Share some of the insights you've gained into your feelings while dialoguing on possessions.

FINANCES

- I. Open discussion:** Which of us in our family worries more about money? HDMAMMF?
- II. Sharing by presenting couple** (husband & wife) How do I feel when our finances are very tight?
- III. Handout:** See following page of questions from How to Stay in Love by Charlie and Martha Shed, pp. 116-117 in their chapter on “Money”. Each spouse answers separately and then compares answers with spouse.
- IV. Discussion:** Time can be allotted for discussion between spouses or the couples can be urged to dialogue the following week on the questions where they disagreed or had the strongest feelings.
- IV. Dialogue Question:** What one item of our budget would I choose to add or increase next year and what one item would I choose to eliminate or decrease if we were to be better stewards of the riches God has provided for us? HDMAMMF?
- V. Open Sharing**

FINANCES HANDOUT

1. Which of us has more training/experience in money management? _____

2. Which of us worries more about money? _____

3. Which of us complains more about money? _____

4. Which of us is more controlled in spending/less controlled? _____

5. Is either of us too tight with our money? _____

6. Do we have a definite system of managing our money (budget & all)? _____

7. Do we save enough? (The Sheds recommend saving 10% and giving 10% of the family income.) _____

8. Do we give enough? _____

9. Do we spend the rest with thanksgiving and praise? _____

10. Do we share with each other in money decision? _____

BEING HONEST WITH OUR FEELINGS

This presentation is intended to give encountered couples a mini effect of the weekend -- a boost, a shot in the arm. Through the focal presentation, followed by unmasked 'where you are at' sharing, knowing that we will be accepted with no judgments, each individual and couple is given support, encouragement, and knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles.

Being honest with our innermost feelings can often be a threatening experience; and then to share them with others, especially our spouse can just add to the overall threat. But to share them with our spouse, we must first face them in ourselves. As a result, we not only have a growing experience with our spouse, but also with ourselves.

I. Generally, how open am I to my own, often threatening, feelings?

- A. What areas did I find threatening. Example: sex, death, God, possessions.
- B. How did I avoid them? What are my reactions?
- C. What were my feelings upon hearing the sex sharing on our weekend?

II. In sharing threatening feelings with my spouse

- A. Before we became a dialoguing couple
- B. Since we have been dialoguing

III. Share a dialogue experience

- A. Subject
- B. Feeling
- C. Summarize letter and dialogue; include the feelings, judgments, and reactions during the writing and the dialogue.
- D. The fruits of the dialogue

IV. Openness to those threatening feelings now

- A. What areas are still threatening
- B. Have you become more open? In what areas?
- C. How has this affected your relationship, understanding, and acceptance of yourself, spouse, children, God, others?
- D. What growth do you hope to achieve in the future recording openness to threatening feelings?

V. Dialogue Question: In what areas of our lives can I be more honest in my feelings with you? HDIF sharing this with you?

VI. Open Sharing: How have we benefited as a couple because of being honest in our feelings with each other?

VII. Scripture: Genesis 2:18-25.

PLEASE NOTE: The honesty stressed in this outline is not a confession type of honesty such as I banged up the car today, etc., but an open and honest approach in communicating our feelings with each other.

FOCUS ON FEELINGS

The start of the new year is a good time to get back to basics. This month's presentation reminds us that feelings are the basic ingredient of who we are. Feelings are the involuntary response to something or someone. Feelings are neither right nor wrong! Knowing this allows us a freedom of expression that can have a tremendous effect on our relationships. You see, you can share money, food or sex with another and still remain complete strangers. In the end, the only way you can mean anything to another human being is to share his feelings.

I. Feelings are neither right nor wrong.

Share our initial and present reaction to this statement. (Husband/Wife share)

II. Share your initial reaction to communicating on a feeling level.

Share a recent reaction. (Husband/Wife share)

III. There are three things that we can do with our spouse's feelings. We can reject them, tolerate them, or accept them.

- A. Give specific personal examples of times when you did the above. (Husband/Wife alternate)
- B. Describe effect on your relationship.

IV. Share how we are most successful in making our feelings come alive in our dialogue.

Give examples of how we use one or all of the following:

- A. Senses
- B. Nature
- C. Past Experiences
- D. Intensity (1 to 10)

V. Share how being aware of our and others' feelings helps us to be more sensitive to God, Family, Community.

VI. Dialogue Question: Have I made an effort to focus on your feelings? HDMAMMF?

VII. Open Sharing question: Share with us your joys and struggles on trying to focus on feelings.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

- 1. Do I accept the idea that feelings are neither right nor wrong? HDMAMMF?
- 2. How does my idea of masculinity/femininity prevent me from focusing on your feelings? HDMAMMF?
- 3. HDIF when I don't get involved with your feelings?

LET'S CELEBRATE

This month's presentation is on the gift of celebration. To celebrate life is to live each day to its fullest and when we are able to do this, there is a vitality within us that seems to be contagious. It adds richness to our relationship with our spouse and spills over into the lives of others. The gift of celebration means finding joy in being right where we are and allowing that joy to be visible.

I. What is it about me that I like and how do I celebrate? (Husband/Wife)

II. In what ways do we celebrate our coupleness? Give specific examples of:

- A. Special times together.
- B. Little day-to-day ways.

III. How do we feel about us when we do these things together?

IV. How do we use our dialogue as a tool to help us to celebrate and enjoy each other? (Be specific.)

V. In what ways do we celebrate and acknowledge God in our relationship? (Preferably everyday examples.)

VI. How do we share our enthusiasm of being a couple with our family and community?

VII. Dialogue Question: When was the last time we experienced a sense of celebration in our relationship and HDMAMMF?

VIII. Sharing Question: Share with us what you do to help you celebrate your relationship.

IX. Scripture: Psalms 100.

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing has ended)

- 1. HDIF when you are excited about us?
- 2. HDIF when we are complimented on our coupleness?
- 3. HDIF when I acknowledge God as part of our celebration?
- 4. HDI think God feels when we acknowledge Him then?

PLEASE SHARE JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF GIVING PRESENTATION.

BE YOURSELVES

HOOKED ON FEELINGS

Based on an article by Jerry & Tippy Case that appeared in the March-April 1982 issue of Worldwide Family SPIRIT.

Husband and Wife should share throughout, giving special attention to personal examples whenever and wherever possible,

I. FEELINGS - NEITHER RIGHT NOR WRONG

- A. Share your attitudes toward feelings prior to your weekend.
- B. What was your response to the concept "feelings are neither right nor wrong"?
- C. How do you respond to feelings now?
 - 1. We know feelings are neither right nor wrong.
 - 2. Our actions do not always indicate that we believe the concept. Give personal examples of this, (i.e., like when I hand a "guilt" trip on myself for wanting to feel comfortable at the expense of others.)

II. SHARED FEELINGS PAY OFF

- A. Share your difficulty in sharing feelings before your weekend.
- B. How did you begin to share feelings on your weekend?
- C. What affect did this sharing have on your relationship?
- D. It is easier to share opinions, judgments, etc., rather than feelings -- explain.
- E. It takes work to discover feelings in myself.
- F. We get careless at times and don't share feelings, yet expect our spouse to "read between the lines" and know what is happening inside of us.
- G. I can't explain what/why happens when we share feelings -- shared feelings make a difference.

III. FEELINGS GET US PAST ISSUES

- A. Issues aren't the issue -- we are.
 - 1. Feelings get us past the issue.
 - 2. We are different people -- we often clash over issues.
- B. Discussion about issues leads to conflict. Only way to get past issue is to focus on feelings.
- C. We are not always honest about our feelings.
- D. Paradox exists.
 - 1. There is no finding me until I lose me.
 - 2. Feelings get us past issue so that I can discover me and so that we can discover each other.

HOOKED ON FEELINGS (cont'd)

IV. UNSPOKEN FEELINGS ARE BLOCKS

- A. Difficulties in our relationship usually indicate that we've ceased sharing feelings.
- B. Unshared/unspoken feelings get most in our way.
- C. Share the effect of unspoken feelings on your relationship.
 - 1. Subtle actions (i.e., - silence instead of laughter; a kiss or touch ungiven)
 - 2. Little things add up to major conflict.
- D. Major conflict adds up to deterioration of relationship
- E. "Feelings are neither right nor wrong. Unspoken feelings do not disappear. Shared feelings have a positive effect on interpersonal relationships. These are the only three things really worth knowing about them . . ." How does this statement affect you?
- F. "But the bottom line has a familiar ring to it. Are these just another set of banners that we have hanging in our heads or are we able to put the beliefs to use? Are we loving the concepts or living the weekend? It does make a difference!"

V. Dialogue Question: HDIFA sharing my feelings with you?

VI. Open Sharing Question: HDIFA the statement: "Shared feelings make the weekend happen all over again"?

I'M OK, YOU'RE OK.

When we make a Weekend and come away with the tools we need to continue to grow together, we use these tools faithfully. A point in time may come, however, when we fall into a false sense of security that leaves us thinking that WE'RE OK and why do we worry about our commitment to daily dialogue. This presentation allows the presenting couple to share with the group, phases of this situation.

I. I'M OK, YOU'RE OK. SO WHAT!

Share what causes you, as a couple, to think that you are O.K. so why work on your coupleness and HDYFAT?

II. I'M OK, HE/SHE IS NOT OK. HOW COME?

Share how you start noticing your spouse is becoming distant and HDYFAT.

III. I'M NOT OK, HE/SHE IS NOT OK. NOW WHAT?

At this point, share how after the walls have built, how you recognize your distance and what you have to do to get back on track and emphasize how the commitment to dialoging daily will keep you from becoming so distant and HDYFAT?

IV. Dialogue Question: Have you experienced “I'M OK, YOU'RE OK. SO WHAT!” and HDIFAMA?

Two-Week Challenge: DIALOGUE and ONE RING THE REST OF FLAME!!!!

RECRUITING IS A WAY OF LIFE

By
Father Bruce Noble

The word “recruit” has, at first, an ominous ring. It brings back your childhood associations of the national wartime advertising campaign, “Your country needs you!” And I must confess, the primal instinct is to say, “who me?” and flee at sight. Or perhaps as a Texan I'm put in mind of a Rodeo, where cattle are herded together to be put on a show, I wouldn't want to do that sort of thing to any couple I know, “They deserve their privacy,” I say.

BUT

“Recruiting is a way of life” is what I was told on my Weekend. How, then is this to be experienced in everyday living. Well, think how it happened in your own case. The details may be different, but the dynamics are the same. Listen to the following two stories, one from the Gospel, and one from modern life, and see how they relate to one another. (You may even see yourself in these stories. Who knows?)

Gospel according to St. John; Chapter 1:

This is the testimony that John gave: “I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. I still did not know him. But God, who sent me to baptize with water, said to me, ‘You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’. I have seen it,” said John, “and I tell you that he is the Son of God.” The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus walking by. “Here is the Lamb of God!” he said. The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, “What are you looking for?” They answered, “Where do you live, Rabbi?” (This word, translated, means “Teacher”.) “Come and see,” he answered. So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of the day with him. (It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.) One of the two who heard John, and went with Jesus, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, At once Andrew found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” (This word means “Christ”.) Then he brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, the son of John. Your name will be Cephas.” (This is the same as Peter, and means “Rock”.) The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come with me.” (Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) So Philip found Nathanael and told him: “We have found the one of whom Moses wrote in the book of the Law, and of whom the prophets also wrote. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” answered Philip.

RECRUITING IS A WAY OF LIFE (cont'd)

An encountered couple called "the Johnsons" approached another couple called "the Andrews" who were their friends, and invited them on a Marriage Encounter Weekend, saying "We can't explain it now, but if you look and see, you will recognize that God is in this weekend. Somehow, we're convinced that He's involved in the experience of a Marriage Encounter." And this couple listened carefully, and trusted the Johnsons enough to sign up and go on a weekend. When they arrived on the weekend, the first questions they were asked to answer at the end of the first talk were directed at what they, as a couple, were looking for:

Why am I here?
What do I hope to gain?

They were a little confused, so early in the weekend, so they themselves asked a question in this case, of the presenting teams, "Where are you really conducting this weekend and why?" The team replied, "Right here in this presentation room, just wait and see." So they kept coming back to the presentation room, and to their surprise, saw that their love relationship could become more real,. So they decided to stay, to hang in there, and work on their relationship. They actually spent the whole weekend seeking to be with and for one another. It was then about four or five in the afternoon.

One of the couples who attended that weekend, in response to the Johnsons, was this couple called the Andrews. Now Mr. Andrew had a brother called Simon Peter. The first thing he did after the weekend was to find his brother, Simon, and Simon Peter's wife, and he said to them, "We have found Jesus the Lord of Life on this weekend. We now know what true love is." And he recruited him for the next weekend saying, "This is a gift for both of you. Come and see."

So the Andrews became like the Johnsons, and it is very likely that the Simon Peters will very soon follow suit.

Recruiting is not a complicated procedures, It is simply sharing -- one couple sharing with another couple where they can find real growth in their relationship. It happens spontaneously if we let it, but it takes a decision to allow it to happen, and to flow with the rhythm. The dynamics are as old as the Gospel itself, and as fresh as the last time you did it.

Share your dream of an encountered world by asking another couple today. All you have to say is "Come and see," and your own experience fills out the rest, The Lord's presence is disclosed on the Weekend. All we have to do is introduce them to the experience of a Marriage Encounter, where they will find Him for themselves.

So dear lovers,
"Go tell THEM. Wait and see"

APPROACHING MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

The basic premise of this presentation is that unless we are willing to go back to the basics, to really examine honestly where we are with each other in our dialogue then, any growth in our dialogue or in our relationship is virtually impossible. Unless we taste the loneliness of "is that all there is?", then we cannot express our desire for more. The second section builds on this basic premise by reminding us how, in order to go beyond where we are with our dialogue, we must reflect upon and put aside some false attitudes and judgments that have at least partially prevented our dialogue from seeing the life-giving part of our relationship that we have so earnestly desired. The point in sharing these false attitudes is not to put down dialogue or feelings or how valuable and special dialogue can be, but rather to remind everyone that sometimes (or perhaps often) we concentrate so much on a technique that we forget us. Then dialogue becomes a thing that we expect to plug in for - presto! - instant relationship. Of course inside of us, we know that dialogue doesn't work that way, but in the third section, it is assumed that at least sometimes we use or see (and are affected by) masks that would suggest otherwise. We deal with our failure to reflect on why dialogue "doesn't seem to work" by grabbing on to standards about dialogue others might set or acting as though dialogue had fallen short instead of our approach to it.

I. Back to the Basics

A. Share how you looked at dialogue when you first heard about it on your weekend and right after your weekend.

1. Was it:
 - a. an exercise?
 - b. a technique?
 - c. an opportunity for me?
 - d. an opportunity for us?
2. Did the thought of dialoguing from then on seem:
 - a. boring?
 - b. scary?
 - c. exciting?
 - d. overwhelming?
 - e. comforting?
 - f. unrealistic?

Note: You should bring out as many of the above attitudes and feelings in your sharing as possible so that the couples will have an opportunity to reflect on their own attitudes and feelings and, in doing so, to see the various possibilities. This could be done by contrasting how you could have looked at dialogue (e.g., as an exercise) with how you actually viewed dialogue (e.g., as an opportunity for us)

B. Share which of the above attitudes and feelings about your dialogue since your weekend have been strongest in your life together as a couple. Share how at times you are aware that dialogue is not all you thought it would be, and how your dialogue is not all you want it to be.

APPROACHING MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE (cont'd)

II. The barriers between dialogue and us.

(False attitudes and judgments that prevent the full positive effect of dialogue from becoming a reality in our relationship.)

- A. Share how you have treated dialogue as a goal through attitudes such as:
 - 1. The most important thing about dialogue is getting it in (VS., e.g., how it's changing our lives).
 - 2. Unless we're experts at dialogue, we've missed the boat and/or we should forget it.
- B. Share how you have made feelings your goal in the wrong way by these attitudes:
 - 1. The real purpose of dialogue is to get a warm glow between us. If we don't, then we've blown it.
 - 2. Unless we achieve a unity of feelings, our dialogue is of little value.
- C. Share how you have made dialogue your only special time. Include times when you have lived these attitudes:
 - 1. We have dialogue as a special time for us, so we really don't have to worry about how we live with each other the rest of the day.
 - 2. Turning on the switch: suddenly tuning in to each other during those precious moments of dialogue when the rest of the day hasn't been like that.
- D. Share how you have viewed dialogue as magic, including how you have wrongly assumed the following:
 - 1. Dialogue will automatically solve any problem in our relationship.
 - 2. Dialogue will instantly change our lives.
 - 3. Dialogue alone is all we need to pay attention to in working at our relationship.

III. Games we play -- the masks of dialogue.

- A. Share dialogue masks you use and see. Include these:
 - 1. Mr. & Mrs. "Perfect Track Record"
 - 2. Mr. & Mrs. "We've Loved"
 - 3. Mr. & Mrs. "We've Grown Beyond That"
 - 4. Mr. & Mrs. "Dialogue Glow" (turning on the light)
- B. For each mask, share how the mask you use or see has affected your relationship with each other.

IV. Dialogue Question: What attitudes and judgments about dialogue have most hindered our dialogue from being life-giving to our relationship? HDIFA putting these attitudes and judgments aside?

V. Open Sharing Question: How have we treated dialogue as a thing and how has this affected our relationship? Do we expect our dialogue to produce instant results? How has this affected our relationship?

HOW THE DIALOG PROCESS HELPS US LIVE OUT OUR DAILY LIVES

We have discovered ourselves and our spouse through dialogue. In this discovery we have and will continue to have the freedom to be the best we can for each other. The tool we use for this continuing growth is our dialogue. It gives us both the trust and love it takes to reach out to each other and then to others around us. This should be a personal sharing of how much your lives have been enriched through using the dialogue process. Be careful, don't preach, just share yourselves.

I. Love Letter.

- A. Share your efforts to make your love letters an encounter with "WE".
Note: The love letter is a gift that allows us to get beyond the separateness and uninvolvedness that are a part of our life.
- B. How you personally put your spouse number one.
 - 1. What you do as you begin your love letter that helps you keep your spouse in focus.
 - 2. The decision you make daily to "give" of yourself to your spouse.
 - 3. Any other ways that are special to you.
- C. How you reach out and experience your spouse more fully through dialogue.
How we strive for deeper acceptance of one another

II. W.E.D.S. Formula.

- A. Write
 - 1. Share your efforts to make your efforts to make your love letter a deep sharing of yourself with your spouse. How the writing is a special experience for your spouse and how you made it special.
 - 2. Share how through the experience of writing you've become more sensitive to each other.
- B. Exchange
 - 1. Share how you exchange love letters -- the little things that make this time special for you.
 - 2. Parallel this exchange technique with the "exchange" of yourselves daily.
- C. Dialogue
 - 1. Explain your experiences with the dialogue process. Personalize this and tell how you do it and what has worked best for you.
 - 2. Give examples of when using the "dialogue" process you have been helped in other "encounters" other than with your spouse.
- D. Select
 - 1. Explain how you select.
 - 2. Share how selecting a question for your next dialogue keeps you focusing on each other's needs and desires to be the best for each other.

HOW THE DIALOG PROCESS HELPS US LIVE OUT OUR DAILY LIVES (cont'd)

III. Non-Verbal

- A. How does non-verbal affect your everyday life?
- B. How does non-verbal affect your dialogue?

IV. Share how dialogue in general has helped you to live God's plan

Be very personal with your examples of how you see God's plan working in your life.

V. Dialogue Question: Why do I think dialogue is important to us in particular? HDMAMMF?

VI. Open Sharing Question: When did the fact that you dialogue actually help in another situation other than daily dialogue with your spouse?

TOWARD A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP:

We owe it to ourselves to discuss and discover various aspects of our relationships at the deepest levels of intimacy and understanding. These ideas and thoughts are presented for that purpose, not necessarily for writing a presentation.

"Whom would you say I am trying to please at this point - men or God? Is this how I seek to ingratiate myself with men? If I were trying to win man's approval, I would surely not be serving Christ!" (Ga. 1:10)

St. Paul is rather blunt in this passage. In the Encounter Movement, we often talk about challenge. How about this passage for a challenge? Frequently, in the Encounter, we say that a couple is "crazy". We think that comment is normally meant as an affectionate way of saying, "We believe you are crazy, but it excites and helps us to see you that way". Well, do you believe that? Living a different lifestyle may very well be what Christ is asking us to do. We spend lots of time seeking man's approval. We can think about our jobs, our friends, our image to others. We can ask ourselves one question above all - "Are we serving Christ?"

Dialogue Question: In the light of this passage, how do I see us living today? HDMAMMF?

Discussion after Dialogue:

1. Have we talked about our goals in life? Should we?
2. To what extent are your goals different from mine? Explain lovingly
3. Are our agreed upon goals achievable and will they serve Christ and His Church?

Sometimes we say to ourselves that we can't go anymore. We are running out of gas. Yet we have, at least at times, the guts to say, "Try me, Lord, and I will respond." It's true that discouragement is a part of our lives. We sometimes say that it isn't fair -- especially after all we have spent, yet, like Him, we are asked to try and try again. The key for us (who are matrimonied) to try again and again is the love we share with each other. We need our sleep, our sex, and our vacation. We need our dialogue. We need to be so wrapped up in each other that the test of our heart and soul will be off the charts. Then the words, "Try me, Lord," will be a glorious gift of you to Him.

Dialogue Question: In what area of our relationship am I seeking to know you better right now? HDMAMMF?

Discussion after Dialogue:

1. Have I thought about our gift to others? What is our gift? How can we best use it for Him?
2. Am I really willing to share my deepest feelings with you? What helps me do that? What keeps me from doing it?
3. Do I have concerns about our total life together that you may not know about? What are they?
4. "Search me, O (spouse), and try me . . ." I love you! Talk about inserting your name in that verse of Scripture with each other.

Dialogue Question: I have lived my life which You have given me, Lord. Now I come back to You. How does thinking about this statement make me feel?

HOW TO DESCRIBE A FEELING IN A LOVELETTER AND IN DIALOGUE

I. Open With Prayer

II. Endearing Quality: Privately each couple shares with their spouse the endearing quality that they saw in him/her that week.

III. PRESENTATION

- A. Recall from weekend talk what a feeling is, different ways of describing them, e.g., nature, smell, touch, sound, color, and fabric, .etc.
 - 1. Color: What color is the feeling?
 - 2. Nature: calm like the gentle waves lapping on the sand on a peaceful summer evening
 - 3. Fabric: soft like cotton, smooth as velvet, coarse like burlap
- B. Share some recent examples on how you have described some feelings in your dialogue.
- C. Play either one of the suggested feeling games (below) to help group describe feelings.

IV. Read dialogue question to the group: "How do I feel when you are tender towards me?"

V. Play Song: "ANNIE'S SONG" by John Denver
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3091MHksLM4>

VI. Dialogue

VII.

FEELING GAMES:

GAME ONE:

PREPARATION: Write feeling words on separate pieces of paper, fold and put into bag.

GAME STARTS: with each person drawing a slip of paper from the bag. Each player describes the feeling word without saying the word. The others must try to guess the feeling word from the description. **HINTS:** your spouse **HELPS** you describe feeling word by asking what color is it? How does it smell? What does it taste like? etc.

GAME TWO:

PREPARATION: Write feeling words on separate pieces of paper, fold and put into bag. On outside of bag, write five words such as: 1) nature; 2) a room in the house; 3) a car; 4) children; and 5) how does it smell? You can use other words through which the group can describe the feeling

GAME STARTS: Each player in turn draws a feeling word from the bag and tries to describe it to the group using the first descriptive word on the bag. after each player has had his turn, the feeling words are returned to the bag, mixed up, drawn again, and described using the second descriptive word on the outside of the bag. This is continued until all the feelings have been described using all the descriptive words.

NOTE:FEELING WORDS ARE ON NEXT SHEET.

FEELINGS

A feeling is a word followed by an adjective or adverb; ex. "I feel lonely. I feel joyful."

If you can substitute "I think" for "I feel", it's not a feeling; ex. "I feel that this is an uplifting experience." It is a judgment, not a feeling.

FEELING WORDS:

SUBMISSIVE
TALKATIVE
EVASIVE
DEFERENTIAL
FIRM
AGGRESSIVE
SELF-ASSURED
ANXIOUS
SEDUCTIVE
OPEN
FEARFUL
ENRAGED
PANICKY
CONFIDENT
TIMID
CHOKED UP
IRRITATED
RESPECTFUL
POWERLESS
PLAYED OUT
BORED
SILLY
GIDDY
SUNSHINY
THRILLED
PEACEFUL
BEWILDERED
CONTENTED
TORN
MIXED UP
DEPENDENT

QUIET
EMBARRASSED
EXCITED
BREATHLESS
BELLIGERENT
RELAXED
VACANT
APPEALING
HARD
DULL
SOFT
DETERMINED
DEFIANT
SURPRISED
HORRIFIED
ECSTATIC
PARALYZED
UPTIGHT
TENSE
HOLLOW
ASHAMED
TENDER
AFRAID
CAUTIOUS
THANKFUL
PLEASED
SPINELESS
TERRIFIED
INSECURE
COURAGEOUS
JEALOUS

FRISKY
DOMINANT
INDEPENDENT
ANGRY
EMPATHIC
CONTEMPTUOUS
EMPTY
TAUT
BUSHED
AFFECTIONATE
AIRY
GRATEFUL
COMPASSIONATE
SYMPATHETIC
LONELY
PROUD
HUMBLE
ALARMED
THREATENED
COMFORTED
HOPEFUL
LOVING
TOLERANT
BURDENED
WEEPY
RESENTFUL
ENVIOUS
CAREFREE
EDGY
GRUMPY
CONFUSED

HANDOUT: HOW TO DESCRIBE A FEELING IN A LOVELETTER AND IN DIALOGUE

- I. NAME IT:** Start with a name for the feeling. You can change it to a better name later, if you think of one. Don't get hung up trying to find a perfect name right at the beginning; no such name may have been invented yet. The name is a starting point. If you don't think you have any feeling, maybe it's empty or uncertain,
- II. SIGHT:** Sight is the first of the six senses. It is often the first thing to strike us about something new. We see many ways,
 - A. Color: The spectrum has seven colors. I may see red when I'm mad, or I may have a problem connecting a single color to a feeling.
 - B. Brilliance: A spring day may be vivid and 'live because it's full of all colors, but it's bright and clear. Other feelings may be dull and dingy, faded and lifeless, or muddy and blah.
 - C. Clarity: Is the feeling clearly defined, or fuzzy and blurry? Is it hidden in fog?
- III. TASTE:** I seldom eat feelings for breakfast, but they often leave a taste in my mouth. Is it bitter, sour, or sweet? Is it juicy, or just mushy? What foods do you enjoy together? What foods do you suffer with together when you're on diets?
- IV. SMELL:** Smell can be a lot like food, so it may be related. It may be as nostalgic as remembering the smell of coming home to an oven of fresh bread. It may be as vigorous as furniture polish. Freshly mowed grass may be either. Is it sour as old milk? Spicy like after shave?
- V. HEARING:** What sounds do you associate with this feeling? Is it loud or soft? Is it quiet, silent, raucous, or beautiful? Is it sullen or sad? Can you liken it to a symphony, a favorite son, a laughing child, or a barking dog?
- VI. FEELING:** Is it rough, like sandpaper, or smooth like velvet? Is it smooth or lumpy, soft or hard, hot or cold, firm or solid? Is it aggravating, like walking in spilled sugar? These are the five senses usually recognized. The sixth is next.
- VII. NATURE:** We can often associate a feeling with something in nature, even when we haven't experienced it personally. I've never bothered a bear cub to see how mad the mother gets, I don't even want to. But I've been cold and wet in a winter rain, or felt great peace seeing a rainbow. How do you feel when you hear a waterfall or contemplate a quiet pond? Have you experienced a roaring ocean in a storm?
- VIII. SHARED EXPERIENCE:** Have you shared this feeling together as a couple? It doesn't take much to remind each other of the experience. The romance of a private picnic in a secluded place can become a "regular" in our dialogue.
- IX. PHYSICAL SENSATIONS:** Take a few seconds to concentrate on the feeling. Notice how your body reacts. Are your hands clammy? Is your stomach full of boulders - or butterflies? Stand outside your own body and look, Is your face red? Is your brow furrowed? Are you fidgety?

WRITE IN LOVE; DIALOGUE IN LOVE.

THE WEEKEND CONNECTION

LIVING OUT OUR LOVE

"...before all men you are to be His witness..."

MENTALITY:

The Open and Caring Couple talk given on Sunday afternoon of our Weekend has many beautiful concepts wrapped up in that 30 or 40 minute presentation. We suppose that on the Weekend itself, some of the concepts are heard and some are not. Unfortunately, what sometimes happens is that we tend to separate that presentation from the rest of the Weekend. It's kind of like saying, "Now that we've experienced the rest of the Weekend for us, here is something which can help us get involved with others," or "Now that we passed the course, here is a job opportunity".

In reality, what we want to try and get across in this presentation is that being an Open and Caring Couple is an integral part of the whole Weekend and more importantly, an Integral part of the Sacrament of Matrimony. We need to set the awareness in the hearts of our couples that the way they are with each other is also, sooner or later, the way they are with others. Now sometimes, for example, the two of us are great for you even though we have a smoldering fire inside of us. The problem is that we start to rely exclusively on your love and affection to affirm us. Then, after a while, your love and affection don't quite do it alone. We need to come back to one another or else we slowly start bowing out of things. We begin to say, "who needs the hassle?" or, "It's time that someone else took over." The bottom line is that we are miserable at home and so to be involved with the members of our church -- to be involved with the Body of Christ -- is like taking a shower with your clothes on. It certainly isn't refreshing or awakening. It's a miserable, soggy feeling,

"O.K., " so much for the down part of being an O & C Couple. Hopefully you can get the point across that being an "involved" couple is not so much what you do, but what you do as a natural result of being close as a couple -- what you become as you grow closer to your faith family. Being an O & C Couple involved the whole Weekend -- the image we have of ourselves, the pressures of the world and how we deal with them the call to the Sacrament of Matrimony. Granted, it doesn't happen overnight and it's something we surely have to work on. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we can set realistic goals. Being an O & C Couple means a lot of things to a lot of people, In this presentation, we need to leave no one untouched.

HOPED FOR OUTCOME;

Clearly, the outcome that we should be looking for in ourselves and those to whom we are speaking is a lifestyle formation, not just a big, long activity list. We need to begin to experience the difference between being "busy people" and living a lifestyle of service.

DEVELOPING YOUR SHARING:

In developing your sharing, we think it would be best to use two parallel tracks: the first, how we live with each other in a given area; and, the second, how we live with others. (That's no big surprise, is it?) Now, in both cases, we are going to ask you to reintroduce the word "Barter" into your vocabulary. We remember that word from our early American History classes.

LIVING OUT OUR LOVE (cont'd)

In a loose definition, it means an exchange of goods and/or services between two parties (i.e., for a night's lodging, I'll give you two bearskins, or for a night's lodging in your bed with you, I'll give you four bearskins). Frequently in our lives, that's the way we live with each other and others. We barter.

Bartering is sometimes good. However, there is much more to our lives as sacramental people. So, the other half of our sharing is about living a life of service. That kind of a life starts off with my disposition toward you, my beloved husband or wife. Only then can the mentality of our relationship with others move forward. Oh, we can still continue to do things, but we become job oriented, not "other" oriented. There are subtle, but very real distinctions between the two. Hopefully, the outline which follows will bring out the difference.

KEY POINTS TO COVER (Outline):

I. How we Barter - Talk about how we "barter with each other as a couple. Include examples from each of the following areas:

- A. Our sexual relationship
- B. Our free time (or private time)
- C. Our material possessions
- D. Our family commitments

The idea is that in each case we can "make deals" with each other. In a sense, it's like the notion that marriage is a 50-50 proposition. (*Approximate time: 7 minutes*)

II. Deal Making - The "deal making" we carry out with each other is, in a way, a reflection of a certain degree of selfish behavior present in us as people. As a couple, we sometimes support that same behavior in each other in our dealings with others. Share specific times when we have mutually agreed that we have done enough. Someone else needs to get involved. In other words, the "deal making" was one-sided and we were on the short end. Examples might be:

- We have been Sunday School teachers for two years now; it's time someone else volunteered.
- I know they need help, but we need a Sunday for us.
- We would like to help out, but we don't have the gift for that.

You get the idea? Excusing ourselves perhaps means that something in our thinking process, as members of Christ's Body, is missing. (*Approximate time: 8 minutes*)

III. Something is Missing - Now, that certain something missing in all of us sometimes is also present in us too. That something is a "life of service" to each other. That phrase sounds a little formal, but it's really "giving" to each other with absolutely no strings attached. The idea is in the God's Plan talk on the Weekend. Share in this part how you as husband and wife have lived totally for the other person. The examples can be simple or heroic; they can be in thought only, or a tireless effort to help the other. You could include:

- The small courtesies.
- The selfless consoling during a personal crisis.
- Ministering to a partner who is ill.
- Freedom and abandonment in your sexual relationship with him/her,
- An experience of joy in thinking about you when I'm not with you.

LIVING OUT OUR LOVE (cont'd)

The list is endless, but in all cases there is no doubt who is #1 in my mind and heart. The couples listening should be moved by this part of the sharing. (*Approximate time: 10 minutes*)

IV. How We Minister - Finally, when we are like the above, it makes a difference in how we minister to the whole Body of Christ, doesn't it? Spend this last few minutes sharing what the difference is like. Examples might be:

- An irresistible attraction to engaged couples, instead of two more kids getting married.
- A sense of caring for the poor and underprivileged which calls us to action.
- A belief in recruiting for our Weekend as a lifestyle for us instead of, "I wish everyone would make it".

(*Approximate time: 5-6 minutes*)

V. Dialogue Question: Name a specific instance when I knew you needed me above all else. What does it mean to me to know I am needed? DFLD

VI. Open Sharing Question: Christ washed the Apostles' feet as a sign of humility and service. What specific personal changes in attitude or behavior do I have to make in order to be a "servant" of God's people?

VII. Closing Prayer: "I have called you by name. You are mine. I forbid you to be afraid. I am with you." (Is, 43)

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

Related Questions for dialogue and discussion in preparing for the presentation:

1. HDIF about the effect our relationship has on other marriages?
2. How is our time spent? HDTMMF?
3. How do our possessions affect my self-image? HDMAMMF?
4. HDIF when a value of yours seems to be contrary to a value of mine?
5. How has our growth as a couple affected our relationship with our church? HDMAMMF?
6. What do I have to change so we can be a more visible sign of the Church? HDMAMMF?
7. Do I see sex as a way of building our sacramental commitment to one another? HDIFAT?
8. How have I responded to pressures we've been feeling lately? HDMAMMF?
9. How did our relationship reflect the universal quality of God's love today? HDMAMMF?
10. HDIF about being part of our United Methodist family in times of doubt and confusion?

WEEKEND CONNECTION PRESENTATION

DISCOVERING FEELINGS & NEEDS IN DIALOGUE

(35 minutes)

- I. Our personal history of dialogue** (H/W, 5 minutes) (Be honest but keep it short)
 - A. Discuss when you did and did not dialogue.
 - B. Explain your attitude toward dialogue (i.e. did you talk about how important it is to you, but still find ways to avoid it?).
 - C. Discuss what you did and did not get out of you dialogue.

- II. Give a short explanation of feelings and their importance to communication** (Part of this presentation has to be in- instructional, but it is also important to keep it motivational).
 - A. Feelings are sensations that come from deep inside us in response to a person, place, or thing. They are what is going on inside of me at a given time, and cannot be controlled. They are unique like communication. When we share them, we discover more about ourselves and our behavior, and who we are to one another in our relationship. (1 spouse, 1 min.).
 - B. Feelings are like red lights and green lights (H/W, 4 minutes.)
 1. Red light feelings alert us to unmet needs
 - a. Anger
 - b. Sorrow
 - c. Fear
 2. Green light feelings indicate that our needs are being met.
 - a. Joy
 - b. Happiness
 - c. Peace
 - C. If I don't share my feelings with my spouse, I am choosing to be private, to be isolated, because my feelings are at the core of who I am (H, 1/2 min.)

- III. Feelings are a signal of something deeper inside us - a need.** (H/W, 5 minutes)
 - A. Emotional needs are the deepest longings of our heart (We are not dealing with physical needs)
 - B. Give an example of a time when I had each emotional need (Divide between husband and wife)
 1. The need to be loved Oust as I am. with all my bumps and bruises)
 2. The need for self-worth (to like who I am and appreciate my goodness)
 3. The need to belong (to be a part of. to make a difference in someone's life)
 4. The need for autonomy - the need to be free to be myself (to not have to lean on someone else to be complete. to have the freedom to be a whole person standing on my own two feet. Not the same as being a married single. Implies being interdependent rather than independent.

DISCOVERING FEELINGS & NEEDS IN DIALOGUE (cont'd)

IV. We try to fill our own needs through compensating behavior rather than in relationship.

(Other spouse. 4 minutes)

- A. We are all responsible for meeting our own needs, but we can only do this when we are in a deep, responsible, intimate relationship (1 spouse. 1/2 minute)
- B. Describe a time when you had a need (preferably the need to be loved or to belong). Describe what happened when you tried to meet that need in a private way. Mention how you began to use compensating behavior (e.g. your mask) to make up for your need. Then describe the difference when you were able to share your feelings and needs with your spouse (1 spouse. 5 minutes)
- C. Describe a time that dialogue pointed out a need that you did not even know you had.

V. **Share the effects of dialoguing on both feelings and needs on your relationship.** (W. 3 min.)

- A. How has it affected the dialogue - do we dialogue more frequently, etc.?
- B. End with a motivation to the group to start or continue to dialogue this way.

VI. **Share how you go about evaluating your dialogue.** (H, 5 min)

- A. Was it good or bad? What did we learn?)
- B. Do we need to continue dialoguing in the same area?
- C. Do we need to discuss the subject after we dialogue?
- D. Do we need to set up a time to discuss solving a problem that the dialogue pointed out?
- E. In what area will we dialogue tomorrow?
- F. F. What did this dialogue show me about myself? About you? About our relationship?

VIII. **Dialogue question** (2 minutes)

WAMFA the intimacy of our communication during the past two weeks? What need is or is not being met" At the end of your dialogue please select a question for tomorrow and write it in each other's dialogue books.

VIII. **Open Sharing Question** (30 minutes): What have I learned tonight that will help me communicate more effectively in our dialogue?

WORLDWIDE FAMILY SPIRIT JUNE 1984

EXPERIENCING OUR CONFIDENCE IN DIALOGUE

One of the most difficult things to do is to get past the confidence block. To share a confidence, a true confidence, takes true love and trust of our spouse. It's one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome in order to have a fantastic dialogue, which results in deeper love and understanding.

I. Share the state of your dialogue as related to confidence,

- A. On weekend
- B. Right after weekend
- C. Now
- D. What it can be and what we're striving for.

II. Weekend concepts on confidence.

- A. One of the key ingredients of dialogue,
- B. We must decide to have confidence.

III. Trust and Love - the key to confidence.

- A. Confidence could still be a stumbling block.
 - 1. What stops you from sharing a confidence.
 - 2. What makes you decide to share a confidence.
- B. How does love and trust allow you to share a confidence.

IV. The "How To" of Confidence.

- A. Describe the kind of people you and spouse are.
- B. Why you have problems because of the kind of person you are.
Share internal struggles, judgments, etc.,
- C. Share how you focus on your spouse and decide to trust.
- D. Share the joy that comes from sharing a confidence with your spouse.

V. Dialogue Question: What feeling do I still have that I haven't been able to share with you?

VI. Open Sharing Question: How has sharing a difficult confidence made us grow?

MEMORIES

I. Opening Prayer

II. Preparation: Everyone draws a symbolic family tree.

- A. The type of tree that represents your family;
- B. The color of the tree that represents your feelings about your childhood;
- C. The ground around the tree that represents your spiritual formation (e.g., deep roots for deep faith, no roots, etc.);
- D. A background behind the tree that represents your dominant childhood memories (e.g., a stream, a horse, a puppy, etc).

Each person explains his drawing to the group.

III. Dialogue Question: When I think back to my childhood, what is my strongest memory? HDMAMMF?

IV. Open Sharing

ALDONZA

My lady!

I'm not your lady; I'm not any kind of a lady.
I was spawned in a ditch by a mother who left me there, naked and cold and too hungry to cry.
I never blamed her. I'm sure she left hoping that I'd have the good sense to die.
Then, of course, there's my father,
I'm told that young ladies can point to their fathers with maidenly pride.
Mine was some regiment here for an hour. I can't even tell you which side.
So, of course, I became as befitted my delicate birth,
The most casual bride of the murdering scum of the earth.

And still thou art my lady!

And still he torments me! How should I be a "lady"?
For a lady has modest and maidenly airs and a virtue I somehow suspect that I lack.
It's hard to remember these maidenly airs in a stable laid flat on your back.
Won't you look at me, look at me, God, won't you look at me!
Look at the kitchen-slut reeking in sweat.
Born on a dung heap to die on a dung heap, a strumpet men use and forget.
If you feel that you see me not quite at my virginal best,
Cross my palm with a coin and I'll willingly show you the rest.

Never deny, thou art Dulcinea!

Take the clouds from your eyes and see me as I really am!
You have shown me the sky, but what good is the sky to a creature who'll never do better than crawl?
Of all the cruel devils who badgered and battered me, you are the cruelest of all!
Can't you see what your gentle insanities do to me?
Rob me of anger and give me despair.
Blows and abuse I can take and give back again.
Tenderness I cannot bear.
So don't reach out to me when your sweet "Dulcinea" you call.
I am only Aldonza. I'm no one. I'm nothing at all.

DEALING WITH DEATH AS A COUPLE

There are many areas that couples are not open to each other and usually those areas are the ones where the strongest or most feared feeling lie. By facing these feelings as a couple, it is often easier to deal with the area of death. We must be cautious not to be "preachy" in this talk, we must not expound upon our own religious theology about death, or we'll turn off many couples right away. What we want to show with this talk is how dealing with a difficult area as a couple has brought us closer together and helped us face our feelings and share them.

I. Views of death before our weekend.

- A. Share how you looked at and talked about the subject of death before your Weekend, such as:
 - 1. Private feelings, didn't want to "make other feel sad too".
 - 2. Not sharing feelings with spouse.
 - 3. Dealing with feelings by burying them.
 - 4. Etc.
- B. Share your feelings and judgments on the weekend when the subject of death was shared, such as:
 - 1. Not open
 - 2. Tried to ignore the feelings.
 - 3. Didn't allow the feelings to surface.
 - 4. Didn't want to share with spouse.
 - 5. Started to share feelings with spouse.
 - 6. Realized my deeper feelings were there.
 - 7. Realized I could share them without "making spouse feel that way".
- C. Typical stumbling blocks that prevent us from finding our own feelings and sharing these with my spouse.
 - 1. Intellectualize
 - 2. Say I can't know how I'll feel when I die (what we usually want to share is how I feel right now when I think about dying and leaving you and/or children, etc.)
 - 3. Confusing our beliefs about life after death with our feelings now.
 - 4. Etc. - any others you can think of.

II. Share how we view death now.

- A. Share how our attitudes and judgments (on death) about sharing our feelings have changed since our weekend.
- B. Share how we have been able to dialogue on our feelings in the area of death and the closeness we felt when we shared our feelings in an area so difficult for us.

Dealing With Death as a Couple (cont'd)

III. Dealing with death as a couples

- A. Share how we are now able to deal with death as a couple, such as:
 - 1. We know each other's views and feelings better.
 - 2. We are able to support each others feelings better since we know each other's feelings better.
- B. Share the closeness we've experienced in our relationship because we are able to share our feelings with each other concerning death.

IV. Dialogue Question: What are some feelings about death I have found difficult to share with you.

V. Open Sharing Question: Share some of the instances of closeness we've experienced through sharing our feelings in a difficult area.

TO LOVE IS A DECISION

This month's presentation is to remind us of how we constantly cycle through the three stages of Love - Romance, Disillusionment and Joy. By sharing our experiences, we become aware of the important role that "To Love is a Decision" plays in our lives. The belief in the statement that "To Love is a Decision" rather than a feeling, gives us the ability to decide to love even when we don't feel loving.

I. Feelings of Closeness and Disillusionment

- A. Describe a recent incident and the feeling of closeness you experienced in your daily lives together. Husband/Wife share. (Be brief.)
- B. Describe a recent feeling of disillusionment. Give specific examples. (Be light, nothing traumatic.)

II. To Love is a Decision

- A. Describe your initial reaction to "To Love is a Decision" when you heard it on the weekend.
- B. What does it mean to you now?

III. How does believing that To Love Is A Decision rather than a feeling affect our relationship? Give specific examples,

- A. Both decision to love and to be loved
- B. Respond vs. react

IV. How does our decision to love affect:

- A. Our Dialogue
- B. Our Relationship with God? Family? Community?

V. Dialogue Question: How does my deciding to allow others to love me make me feel? Describe those feelings in loving detail.

VI. Open Sharing Question: Share with us a joy you've had in making the decision to love.

VII. Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7

Suggested Questions: (to be given after sharing is ended)

- 1. How much is love still a response to a feeling for me? HDMAMMF?
- 2. What has been my biggest difficulty in living our "To Love is a Decision"? HDMAMMF?
- 3. HDIF when I decide to put my spouse first?

TO LOVE IS A DECISION

by Fr. Chuck Gallagher, S. J.

When you were engaged, did anybody try to calm you down? Perhaps they said, "Hey, lots of people have been engaged before. Don't get so excited." That hurt, didn't it? You just didn't think they had any right to take your thrill of having won the love of your fiancée. Did anybody try to warn you about what was in store for you? If somebody told you, "Well, marriage is not a bed of roses," how did you react then? How do you react now?

When you meet somebody who's in love, do you give them those very same warnings you resented ten or twenty or forty years ago? Do you find those warnings make much more sense now. Have you finally bought into what everybody was telling you when you first got engaged? People kind of described it like a disease. If you just get enough fresh air and eat an apple every day, you'll get over it. After all, it happens to everybody.

But you didn't say that when you were just engaged. You didn't say we're going to be like everybody else. You said there's never been a guy like my guy. There's no woman in this world like my woman. That's precisely it. It's the **MY** that is the wonder of it all. He's chosen me. She wants me.

It isn't so much that we've gotten used to each other and that's why we calmed down. It's that we've gotten used to being chosen. There's no wonder to that anymore. We're not stunned by the fact that such a good gal, such a neat guy, could have selected me above all the men and women in the world. That's what we've got to return to.

It's not so much looking at the other person through rose-colored glasses or seeing them as ten feet tall. It's being chosen as a wife, as a husband, that is so magnificent. And that choosing goes on, on a daily basis. It's not something that was done once and for all. So it's not something we should EVER get used to. It's just as awesome today to be chosen as it ever was. When we lose sight of being chosen, we really miss who the other person is.

This is not just another man or woman with defects like anybody else. This is one who has made a personal selection of me and risked their whole life on my response. That's where the wonder lies.

We weren't dumb in those early days. We knew the other person wasn't perfect. But perfect or not, what was overwhelming was that I was wanted. That made any fault seem of minor importance. Once I really concentrate on the overwhelming reality of being chosen, that very fact outweighs all the rest. The fact that he's still choosing me today, that she still wants to belong to me, is even more impressive and more touching than the fact of being chosen in the first place.

The beautiful thing about the engagement time is that our whole focus was on one another. Our concentration, our enthusiasm and our mind sets were all on being with one another and communicating with one another. We sometime allow that to fade. That's the fundamental problem. It's not that we've gotten use to one another but that we're not as much FOR one another as we were in those early days.

TO LOVE IS A DECISION (cont'd)

We've ceased putting our prime interest and attention on being with one another. We've accepted the fact that there are regular times when we're going to be with one another and that's okay. That's the basic problem. It's okay and it doesn't bother us. Since we're going to be with one another today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, we don't have to be fully alert.

What we're really asking you to do here is to describe your marriage and see how it stacks up with the way you saw it when you began your love. Not how it stacks up against some ideal marriage that's in a textbook, not how you rate on some test in Redbook or Good Housekeeping, but just in accordance with your own hopes and dreams.

Maybe you're a little huffy right now. You say "Of course we're different now, we're older." Older and wiser or older and duller? "Well, we're more mature." Maturity is sometimes an excuse for laziness or selfishness. What we have to look at is how much of ourselves we're really putting into this relationship.

"I don't have to do that anymore because I've been through all that." We have all that to look back on and it's a good foundation for our marriage, but we're on to other things now. It's a different kind of relationship once you've been married for a while. We go through different things. Well, the truth of the matter is that you haven't been through today. Today's a new day and your marriage is new. You have tremendous opportunities. All it really takes to make them truly big is to go after them with enthusiasm and with interest.

You say, "Well, we have so many responsibilities, we can't be pawing each other all the time and we can't be battling the baby blues, etc. We have things to do." But, YOU'RE the thing to do in marriage.

It's really sour grapes anyway, because the fact of the matter is you were just as busy when you were a teenager or young adult as you are now. You lived in a home, went to college, and had a job. You were no less occupied. We forget that. We think that we were so free when we were young and we met and fell in love. That simply is not true. We were responsible people then. We took care of getting our studies done and other jobs that we had. Maybe we have a much bigger job today than we had then, but in all probability we still work the same number of hours.

Time is simply not the problem we make it out to be. We were every bit as occupied in those days. The difference is that you are no longer preoccupied.

That's a big difference.

Our preoccupation was with one other. Now we concentrate on one another when it seems appropriate or there's a particular need or there's nothing else on our mind and we can fit each other in. But we were never satisfied with that before. It was never enough. We always wanted more of one another.

The difficulty today is we don't get the most out of our experience with one another. We use sour grapes excuses. We've accepted that our young dreams were just that. Dreams, not visions.

TO LOVE IS A DECISION (cont'd)

You know the difference between a dream and a vision? A dream is something that I have for myself. It's where I wander through fantasyland. I hit all the home runs, I score the winning touchdown, I get elected president, I'm queen of the May. It's kind of an interior video tape that I can entertain myself with at any time. Dreams are for self-entertainment.

But a vision is a picture of something that is real and it's not for the person who has it, but for the person to whom they reveal it. So then, do we have dreams about our marriage or do we have visions? Do we just have pious wishes about our marriage, a mentality that goes along the line of wouldn't it be nice IF? Or do we have a real vision about our age, a firmness in our will and a real determination to live out our decision to love.

We certainly worked very hard at our engagement period. We really went all out to please each other, and it was because of that eagerness to please that we created such a wonderful appreciation of one another.

Another problem that we have is that our concentration seems to be more on ourselves and what we're getting out of our relationship rather than on what we're putting into it. Basically, during our engagement period we were giving everything that we had. That's why we were getting so much. Not because the more we gave the more the other person gave. That could have been true, but the more we gave the more conscious we were of what the other person was giving

The old story of "Input equals Output" is never truer than when it comes to a marriage. We were focusing then on how much more we had to give. Now we tend to focus on how much more we have to get.

One great problem today is that we measure. "I'm doing my share, you're not doing yours." It's a nice 50-50 relationship. So, I could say, "After all, you weren't nice to me today so that frees me to be unpleasant or indifferent and besides, I was in that kind of mood anyway, so now I have an excuse." Or, "I've been doing all the giving. I have to see some change and some effort on your part before I'll try it." Or, "I have my defects, you have your defects, so we learn to put up with one another." It's so ecumenical, isn't it?

Each of you have had many, many moments of grace over your years of love. They gave you a chance to think about the two of you and to do better for a while. The wedding of a friend always gets you to look at one another, doesn't it?

The death of a parent, a fiftieth wedding anniversary in the family, a book we've read, the divorce of someone close. There have been charismatic moments that have offered occasions for real conversion experiences. The serious sickness of myself or my spouse, the birth of our children, our Marriage Encounter Weekend, and meeting other couples in Marriage Encounter.

We seem to improve for a while and then plateau again. This time maybe on a little higher level so we're better than we were before, but we're still skating. We can't seem to maintain our ambition for our marriage the way we do with our job or with our children. We're content to do well enough or maybe better than most.

TO LOVE IS A DECISION (cont'd)

Whenever we say better than most, we always compare to the worst we know. What we do is point across the street at the guy who always comes home at nine o'clock at night to excuse the fact that I only do that once or twice a week.

We take the horror-stories, all the divorces and the physical abuses that are afflicted on wives and so forth and then we're grateful that's not happening to us. But that still doesn't make a great marriage. That doesn't give us true happiness. There may be a certain amount of curious satisfaction, a certain sense of relief over a narrow escape. We could have been there too, and thanks be to God, we're not.

But the fact of the matter is when we met and fell in love, that was not our ambition for one another. We were not going to be satisfied with just not getting a divorce or not being as unhappy as so many of the marriages we saw around us were.

But we were not all that naive in those days. We knew that a lot of marriages turned out poorly. But we weren't concentrating on that at all. We were aiming for the stars. Maybe that was all a dream. But if we have a vision for each other, we can still reach those stars. It's not too late. To love is a decision.

IF GOD SHOULD SPEAK

"Our Father which art in heaven..."

Yes

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

But you called me!

Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. "Our Father which art in heaven"

There, you did it again,

Did what?

Called me. You said, 'Our Father which art in heaven'. Here I am. What's on your mind?

But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting a duty done.

All right, go on.

"Hallowed be thy name..."

Hold it. What did you mean by that?

By what?

"Hallowed be thy name?"

It means --- it means... Good grief, I don't know what it means. How should I know? It's just part of a prayer. By the way, what does it mean?

It means honored, holy wonderful.

Hey, that makes sense. I never thought about what "hallowed" meant before. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Do you really mean that?

Sure, why not?

What are you doing about it?

Doing? Nothing I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there.

Have I got control of you?

Well, I go to church.

That isn't what I asked you. What about that habit of lust you have? And your bad temper? You've really got a problem there, and the way you hang onto your money instead of sharing with those less fortunate.

Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those phonies at church.

Excuse me. I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Oh, all right. I guess I do have some hang-ups. I could probably name some others.

So could I.

IF GOD SHOULD SPEAK (cont'd)

Now that you mention it, I I haven't thought about it very much until now. But I would really like to cut out some of those things. I really would.

Good, now we are getting somewhere. We'll work together, you and I. Some victories can really be won. I'm proud of you.

Look Lord, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does. "Give us this day, our daily bread."

You need to cut out the bread. You're overweight as it is.

Hey, wait a minute! What is this, "Criticize me day" Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my hang-ups.

Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I am trying to get across to you. You called me and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer --- (pause) --- well, go on.

I'm scared to.

Scared of what?

I know what you'll say.

Try me and see.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors".

What about Bill?

See! I knew it! I knew you'd bring him up! Why Lord, he's told lies about me, cheated me out of some money. He never paid back that debt he owes me. I've sworn to get even with him!

But your prayer? What about your prayer?

I didn't mean it.

Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun, carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it?"

No. But I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I got some plans for old Bill! He'll wish he never did me any harm.

You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you already are. But I can change all that.

You can? How?

Forgive Bill. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Bill's problems and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will have settled your heart.

But Lord, I can't forgive Bill.

Then I can't forgive you.

Oh, you're right. You always are. And more than I want revenge on Bill I want to be right with you. (pause) (sigh) All right, All right. I forgive him. Help him to find the right road in life, Lord. He's bound to be awfully miserable, now that I think about it. Anybody who goes around doing the things he does to others has to be out of it. Some way, somehow, show him the right way.

IF GOD SHOULD SPEAK (cont'd)

There now! Wonderful! How do you feel?

Well, not bad. Not bad at all. In fact, I feel pretty great. You know, I don't think I'll have to go to bed tonight uptight, for the first time since I can remember. Maybe I won't be so tired from now on, because I'm not getting enough rest.

You're not through with your prayer. Go on.

Oh, all right. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Good! Good!' I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

What do you mean by that?

What about the little poker game with the boys when you tend to lose more than you can really afford - or the times you stay home from your job and call in sick - or that little matter of cheating on your taxes ...

I don't understand.

Sure you do. You've done it a lot of times. You get in bad situations, you get into trouble, and then come running to me. "Lord, help me out of this mess, and I promise you, I'll never do it again". You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?

Yes, and I'm ashamed, Lord. I really am.

Which bargain are you remembering?

Well, when the woman next door saw me backing away from the neighborhood bar, I told my wife I was going to the store. I remember telling you, "Oh Lord, don't let her tell my wife where I've been, I promise I'll be in church Sunday."

She didn't tell your wife, but you didn't keep your promise did you?

I'm sorry Lord. I really am. Up until now, I thought that if I just prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like it did.

Go ahead and finish your prayer.

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen"

Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?

No, but I'd like to know. I want to please you. I can see what a mess I've made of my life. And I can see how great it would be to really be one of your followers.

You just answered the question.

I did?

Yes, the thing that would bring me glory is to have more people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together.

Lord, let's see what we can make of me, O.K.?

Yes, let's see.

APPLES

The couple responsible for this presentation for the evening should bring apples to the meeting. You will need enough for each person and some paper towels.

I. Distribute Apples.

Instruct the group; pick out some particular apple that in some way reminds you of yourself, because of the markings, shape or characteristics of the apple.

II. Collect Apples.

Each person is then instructed to study the apple, paying attention to the uniqueness of the apple he/she has selected. Have them polish the apple with a paper towel as they are looking over their apple. Then have everyone put their apple back in the bowl.

III. Dialogue Question: Briefly describe one particular time in your life when you felt like you really sparkled. How did this make you feel?

IV. Distribute Apples.

Mix up the apples. Do this away from the group. Place the bowl in the center of the group and ask each person to now find the apple that he/she originally picked out.

V. Describe Apples.

Have each person, in turn, tell the group why he/she selected that particular apple.

VI. Open Sharing.

Have each person tell about one area in his/her life where he/she thinks he/she “shines” and one area where he/she needs a little “polishing.”

THE ROSE

I. Opening Prayer.

II. Handout. Hand out the words to the song “The Rose.”

III. Play “The Rose”. Play the song as you read the words aloud.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxSTzSEiZ2c>

IV. Handout. As the song ends, quietly hand out real roses with baby breath, wrapped up in tissue paper and tied with a red ribbon.

V. Dialogue Question: What is the condition of the seed of love in our relationship?
HDIFSTWY?

VI. Open Sharing

THE ROSE

SOME SAY LOVE, IT IS A RIVER
THAT DROWNS THE TENDER REED.

SOME SAY LOVE, IT IS A RAZOR
THAT LEAVES YOUR SOUL TO BLEED.

SOME SAY LOVE, IT IS A HUNGER
AN ENDLESS ACHING NEED.

I SAY LOVE, IT IS A FLOWER
AND YOU ITS ONLY SEED.

IT'S THE HEART AFRAID OF BREAKING
THAT NEVER LEARNS TO DANCE.

IT'S THE DREAM AFRAID OF WAKING
THAT NEVER TAKES THE CHANCE.

IT'S THE ONE WHO WON'T BE TAKEN
WHO CANNOT SEEM TO GIVE.

AND THE SOUL AFRAID OF DYING
THAT NEVER LEARNS TO LIVE.

WHEN THE NIGHT HAS BEEN TOO LONELY
AND THE ROAD HAS BEEN TOO LONG,

AND YOU THINK THAT LOVE IS ONLY
FOR THE LUCKY AND THE STRONG.

JUST REMEMBER IN THE WINTER
FAR BENEATH THE BITTER SNOW,

LIES A SEED THAT WITH THE SUN'S LOVE
IN THE SPRING BECOMES A ROSE.

May the rose that is your love blossom into fullness and beauty on this night.

WHY DON'T YOU GROW UP!

Tomorrow will come. One of these days you'll shout, "Why don't you kids grow up and act your age." ... and they will.

Or you'll say, "Kids, get outside and find yourselves something to do, and don't slam the door." ... and they won't.

You'll straighten the boy's bedroom neat and tidy, baseball cards in a neat stack, spreads tucked and smooth, toys displayed on the shelves, hangers in the closet with clothes attached, pets caged. And you'll say, "Now this is the way I want it to stay!" And it will.

You'll prepare a perfect meal with a salad that hasn't been picked to death and a cake with no finger prints in the frosting. And you'll say, "Now that's a meal fit for company!" And you'll eat it alone.

You'll say, "I want complete privacy on the phone! No dancing around, no pantomimes, no written questionnaires, no demolition crews. SILENCE, PLEASE, do you hear?" And you'll have silence.

No more plastic place mats with spaghetti stains. No more spreads to protect the couch from wet bottoms and dusty feet. No more gates to stumble over in the doorway of the baby's room. No more Hot Wheels and Barbie Dolls under the couch. No more playpens to arrange the room around.

No more anxious nights with the vaporizer going continually. No more cracker crumbs on the sheets. No more wall-to-wall water in the bathroom. No more iron-on patches. No wet, knotted shoelaces, pants with the knees out, or rubber bands for ponytails.

Imagine:

A lipstick with a point on it.
Not needing a baby-sitter for New Year's Eve.
Family washing, only once a week.
Seeing a steak that isn't ground.
Marketing with only groceries in the basket.
No more PTA meetings.
No more car pools.
No more washing her hair at nine o'clock at night.
No more blaring radios or Sesame Street twice a day on TV.
No more wondering where the family car is now.
Having your own roll of Scotch tape.

Think about:

No more Christmas presents out of construction paper and Elmer's Glue.
No more sloppy oatmeal kisses.
No more Tooth Fairy.
No more giggles and "whispered" conversations in the dark.
No knees to heal with a kiss 'to make it all better.'
No more responsibility.

Only a voice crying, "Why don't you kids grow up?" and the silence echoing, "We did."

CHRIST IS RISEN FOR US TODAY!

An Easter Presentation

This presentation is intended to give encountered couples a mini effect of the weekend, a boost, a shot in the arm. Through the formal presentation, followed by unmasked "where you are at" sharing, knowing that we will be accepted with no judgments, each individual and couple is given support, encouragement, and the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggles.

Each and every day we as individuals in a sacramental relationship are called upon to live and give our lives fully to each other unselfishly in the same way Christ gave and continues to give to us. However, when we start thinking only of ourselves, perhaps even taking advantage of the other, we can easily find it convenient to forget about our relationship and thus can even allow ourselves to hurt our beloved spouse, whereby our couple relationship suffers, as does our relationship with Christ. At these times, only when we can grace each other with our love, can we allow Christ to grace us with His love, and we can again become a couple in love.

I. The Gift of Ourselves

- A. In what ways do we, as a couple, strive to give to each other unselfishly in our everyday life? (H/W)
- B. When we do give to each other unselfishly, how do we experience Christ's love within us? (H or W)

II. Holding Back the Gift

- A. In what ways do we tend to put ourselves first, thus neglecting our beloved? (H/W)
- B. How does our relationship suffer? (H or W)
- C. How does our relationship with Christ suffer? (H or W)

III. What prevents/hinders me in trying to heal our relationship with each other when it is hurt? (H/W)

IV. Forgiveness and Healing

- A. When both of us can forgive and heal our relationship when it hurts, what joys do we experience? In other words, describe the joys of healing. (H or W)
- B. How does dialogue help us to heal? (H or W)
- C. When we heal each other, in what ways is it easier to heal any strained relationships with our children, friends, and the church? (H or W)
- D. How do we experience Christ's healing in us as a couple? (H or W) (The point to bring out here is that Christ always loves us and He doesn't heal us, but it's His love for us that allows us to heal our relationship and make it whole again. And it's this love that is alive within us as Christ's image. Christ died for us as a couple, so as to remove the burdens of sin and hurts from our shoulders. But just as important in our couple relationship, He also rose above His death for us as a couple to live on and grow just as our couple relationship must live on and grow. His eternal love can continue to live within our relationship in spite of our setbacks and give us the grace to heal.)

The purpose of this presentation is to concentrate on the healing, so we urge you to cover I and II briefly, but concentrate more on III and even more so on IV.

CHRIST IS RISEN FOR US TODAY! (cont'd)

V. Dialogue Question: WAMF knowing that Christ rose for us as a couple on Easter Day?

VI. Open Sharing Question: What new awarenesses do we have of Easter now? and/or What ways have we discovered are useful to heal each other?

VII. Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10; 16-20.

Other Questions:

1. HDIF knowing that Christ's love continuously lives within our relationship?
2. How do I give of myself unselfishly to you? HDMAMF?
3. HDIF when I put myself first?
4. HDIF when our relationship is hurting?
5. HDIF when our relationship with Christ is hurting?
6. How can I give more of myself to you?
7. HDIF when we experience a healing?
8. HDIF when we read the prayer for "Matrimonial Grace" together? (p. 429 in New Prayer Book)

SHARE IN LOVE AND ABOVE ALL, BE YOURSELVES

A CHILD IS BORN FOR US TODAY, ALLELUIA!

An Advent Presentation

The birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, is certainly a monumental gift given to every individual here on earth. He was born, lived and died, so that each man, woman, and child could have never ending life through Him. For this, each Christian rejoices in His birth. But for us couples here tonight, there is even more, For while God revealed His plan for our marriage as far back as in Genesis with the words "a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife in such a way that the two become one person", it was Christ who came and showed us by example how we are to love each other in our daily relationship with our spouse. And, that is, that we are to love each other as Christ loved His holy bride, the Church. Yes, He is a living example of what our Father wants for us and expects from us, as a couple. Truly, then, can it be said that a Child is born for us today, Alleluia!

- I. Throughout our weekend,** our love for and our relationship with each other was somehow being compared with that of Christ and our heavenly Father. What was my initial reaction to:
- A. Three and two are one;
 - B. Love one another as I have loved you; and
 - C. As Christ loved the Church.

- II. How was or wasn't Christ a part of our marriage?** Include here before and after our weekend.

- III. How does Christ, our relationship, and dialogue all effect and interact on each other?**

- IV. What were my thoughts, attitudes, judgments, and feelings about Christmas before our weekend?**

- V. What is my reaction to "A Child is born for us today, Alleluia!"?**

- VI. Dialogue Question:** HDIF knowing that a Child was born for us as a couple today?

- VII. Open Sharing Question:** How has Christmas changed for us as a couple since our weekend?

- VIII. Scripture:** Luke 2:10-14,

Other Questions:

1. HDIF knowing that God has a stake in our marriage?
2. HDIF knowing that Christ is God's gift to us?
3. What does Christmas mean to me now?
4. HDIF knowing that you are God's gift to me?
5. WAMF when I hear a Child is born for us today?
6. How does the love of Christ affect our marriage?

SHARE IN LOVE AND ABOVE ALL, BE YOURSELVES.....WE LOVE YOU!!!!!!

BUT WE HAVEN'T MISSED LOVE!

(An Out Of Season Valentine By Lois Wyse)

I. Read Poem.

It was late.

You were asleep, and I was sitting at the table in the kitchen copying a recipe.

When all of a sudden I realized that it didn't matter whether it was one cup of sugar or two cups of flour.

You see, my dear, our life has not been one of weights and measures.

A pound of love for you.

Sixteen ounces of thanks for me.

Nothing works that way, not if it works.

I closed the cookbook and opened my life. It was like a movie.

You know: the Big Flashback. Well, that's what I did today, the Big Flashback.

I thought about you the way you were the first time we met.

I thought about how you looked at me.

And if I hadn't looked that same look back at you maybe we never would have met.

And just think what we would have missed!!

We would have missed: Tuition and camp fees and outgrown clothes, and soft wet kisses and very big hugs and somebody little saying, "I love you."

We would have missed: The first apartment with that terrible furniture and the refrigerator door that opened into the hall. And the joy of moving out.

We would have missed: A lot of walking, countless streetcar rides and the pride of owning our first second hand car.

We would have missed: The standee tickets, the balcony seats, and the thrill of moving up to the orchestra.

We would have missed: The good-byes at the airport, the farewells at the train stations and a lot of memorable hellos.

We would have missed: Pediatricians bills, allergists fees, tonsils out, braces in, and we would have been able to afford the psychiatrist we don't need instead.

I suppose, my dear, that we have missed: The fun of giving and getting furs and jewels and trips to Hong Kong. We have missed a house in the country, a villa in France, and sixty dozen opening nights.

BUT WE HAVEN'T MISSED LOVE! (cont'd)

But we haven't missed love.

Although there were times it seemed so.

No, we haven't missed love.

Not too many couples can say that, I suppose. Oh, we are busy getting and gaining and wondering where the stock is today. But I know if the sky falls, you'll come to me.

I know too, that our marriage now isn't what our marriage was.

It's a lot better now. Like wine, our marriage took aging.

So here's to our vintage marriage. Here's to potato chips in bed, and children that cough in the night. Here's to dinner out and dinner in and "I won't be home for dinner." Here's to the hot of marriage and here's to the cold of marriage – cold feet, cold cuts, cold cream. Here's to touching up gray hair and combing over bald spots.

Here's to expanding waistlines, shrinking wallets, and the fun of making both happen.

Here's to you.

Here's to me.

Here's to us.

Here's to recipes written by night.

For a life that still isn't perfect.

But just between you and me, love,

Did you expect it to be this good?

II. Each couple lights a candle around a circle and holds it in front of them. This is an example of each couples' light in the world. The presentation includes a discussion of things we as a couple can offer the world. The candles are then all placed together in the center of the circle of couples. This represents the combining of separate offerings.

III. Dialogue Question: "How does seeing the light of our couple love grow even brighter when combined with that of other couples make me feel?"

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE KID KIND

Sandy and Bob Sheraw

SANDY: (Read I Corinthians chapter 13 with special emphasis on verse 11.)

When Bob and I were preparing this program, we thought about things that are troublesome to our family, Like many families with growing children, we find conflicts coming up about what is the best way to raise our kinds. Those basic disagreements are not only between parent and child, but between parents. We don't see conflict as necessarily a negative experience, but a chance to look at issues more closely and grow together as a couple and a family.

BOB: Our presentation will center on how these conflicts affect us as a couple and how we can direct our efforts to deal with encounters of the Kid Kind toward strengthening our relationship as a couple and thus as a family.

In your notebooks, take time now to write down a recent time when you had a Close Encounter of the Kid Kind which spilled over to affect the relationship between you and your spouse. (Wait a few minutes while couples write.) Now draw a line down the center of the page. On one side write "KID" and on the other side write "SPOUSE". Under "KID" name a feeling or two that you had at the time related to Kid. On the other side under "SPOUSE", name a feeling or two related to Spouse. Don't describe these feelings now -- just name them.

SANDY: We want to share with you one of our favorite passages from THE PROPHET by Kahlil Gibran.

BOB: *And a woman who held a babe against
her bosom said, Speak to us of Children,
And he said:
Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but-not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts,
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you,
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.*

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE KID KIND (cont'd)

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;*

*For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

SANDY:

*And a woman who held a babe against
her bosom said, Speak to us of Children.
And he said:
Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you.
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

The first time I read this section of the poem I can remember thinking, "Obviously, this author is not a woman or he wouldn't say that your children don't belong to you.,, Who else would my children belong to but me? I carried them for nine months and then LABORED to give them birth, How could I deny that they belonged to me? Who could have a more valid claim to them than Bob and me? We loved them, fed them, changed them, rocked them, and worried over them through one illness and another. We invested a lot of love, time and energy in nurturing these babies; of course they were ours. By the time they were two or three years old, we found out they did not belong to us as a possession might. They were individuals in every sense of the word. They really belonged to themselves.

BOB: "Your children are not your children."

How can that be? They certainly are mine! I helped conceive them, I brought them home from the hospital, I changed their diapers, put food on the table for them, clothes on their backs, and a roof over their heads, I worried over them when they were sick. Who else could they possibly belong to? But when I look closer, I see that indeed they are not "my" children. They may depend on me for physical survival, but the center of their being belongs to God. They are the vessels for God's plan for the future. And I am just the caretaker to see that they have the opportunity to carry out God's plan.

SANDY:

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams,
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE KID KIND (cont'd)

I really had a hard time with the section that said, "You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you". First of all, why would I want to be like them? Any of you who have a teenager around the house, know this is not the easiest time of life for either teenager or parent. One day they want to be treated like an adult and the next day they act like a child. Don't teenagers need the firm loving discipline that caring parents can give? What is wrong with trying to give them the values that you live by? If those values have served your family well, why not try to have them continued in the next generation? I think the answer to that is your values have served your needs as an individual. My children are different individuals and will live in a different time, probably a different place, and with different needs. I hope my children take on some of the values that Bob and I believe in, but I know that it will be their choice. We cannot knit them a sweater of our values and make them wear it. Bob and I can stand together as a loving couple and loving parents to show them this is what we believe is right. We can also pray for wisdom to know when to hold firm and when to let go.

BOB: "Their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow."

Sandy and I have a responsibility to love them, to guide them. After all, we chose to bring them into the world. But we can only give them love and guidance; because we all are created with the freedom to choose, to have our own thoughts. When I have a conflict with one of the kids, my first reaction is often feelings of anger and disappointment. I feel alone, like being left marooned on an island. I'm separated from the people I love the most in the world. That's a worse feeling. So after the anger passes, I can see the event as an expression of their independence, as a test flight of their young wings. It strengthens my resolve to be, alone- with Sandy, a good caretaker. To keep our couplehood strong, to give the kids a chance to make their own decisions and mistakes, and then to be there afterward to pick them up, love them, and kiss their skinned knees -- "for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow".

SANDY:

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

It says I must let go. I must send my children out to face what life has to offer. All my instincts as a mother say that it's my job to love those children and protect them from everything that could hurt them. It is an impossible job. The absolute best I can do for my kids is to teach them right from wrong and allow them to make their own mistakes. Hopefully, the mistakes will be little ones that don't hurt too much. If they are big mistakes, at least I will be there to love them comfort them and encourage them to try again. It won't be easy, but I'm not alone. Bob is beside me and God watches over us all. I could not risk sending my children into the world if I didn't firmly believe that God loved them and would care for them even better than I could.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE KID KIND (cont'd)

BOB: "You are the bows which your children as living arrows are sent forth."

Raising children necessarily means times of joy and times of sorrow, times of harmony and times of conflict. On our weekend, Sandy and I realized that these feelings are neither right nor wrong -- they are just part of what we are. Our children are made the same way. With our decision to love each other, with the love and support of dear friends and with the love of God, we can become the strong and stable bow in the hand of the Archer. "For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable."

We have a dialogue question for you now:

When we as a couple disagree on the best method to handle a conflict over a child's actions, HDTMMF?

PASS OUT DIALOGUE QUESTION AND PASSAGE FROM THE PROPHET.

When you exchange notebooks, look at the event your spouse noted earlier and the two lists of feelings; then read the letter your spouse lovingly wrote to you.

I CORINTHIANS 13 FOR COUPLES

by REV. ROBERT GOSSETT

I may be able to speak to presidents, kings and even to God, but if I can't speak lovingly to my spouse, I, am like a noisy washing machine or a garbage disposal with a bottle cap in it. I may speak eloquently before great crowds of people;-I may understand what makes the television work and be able to tune a car so it purrs like a kitten; I may have faith that my baking and cooking will always turn out to perfection, but if I don't have love, I am nothing. I may give away my microwave, waterbed and skis to those less fortunate, I may throw myself in front of a car to push a neighbor's child out of the way, but if it's not done with love, it does me no good.

Love is patient, (like waiting an hour for the school Christmas program to begin because you came early to get a front seat.) Love is kind, (like stepping out on the cold floor to get another blanket because your lover is cold.) Love is not jealous (when your life's partner gets more recognition than you do at the company picnic.), love is not ill-mannered, (like pointing out your mate's weaknesses in front of other people.) Love is not selfish, (by insisting that you watch only your favorite T.V., programs.) Love is not irritable, (because he didn't put his socks in the hamper) nor resentful (because of past mistakes). Love does not rejoice and say "I told you so," (when he loses money on a business deal) but rejoices when a wise decision is made which strengthens the family.

Love bears all things, (like sleepless nights when the baby is sick, times of separation when his job takes him away, or times of too much togetherness and tension when he is unemployed.). Love believes all things, (like seeing the beauty in your mate when other people see only the common.) Love hopes all things, (like seeing the day his drinking will stop or her failing health will be restored.) Love endures all things (because a commitment was made to love each other and to work together "until death do us part," and you're not willing to give up easily.)

Love never ends (because love is from God Who is love.) We could no sooner exhaust His love than we could remove all the water from the Atlantic Ocean with a teaspoon. Our predictions about the household gadgets of the future will pass away, our knowledge about how to raise perfect children and how to be a perfect husband or wife are all flawed like a torn garment, but it doesn't keep us from striving for perfection.

When I was a child I thought marriage was a beautiful wedding and a young couple who moved to their first home, raised a family and lived storybook, romance-filled, quarrel-free, blissful lives forever. After many years of marriage which contained financial problems, illness, harsh words said in anger, and the innumerable adjustments needed to blend two very different lives into a loving team, I a man put away the childish ideas-that love never needs to say "I'm sorry" and that real men never cry. My view of marriage is still like looking into a tarnished mirror, but with God's help I'm growing in my understanding of married love and what it means to walk together hand in hand into an unknown future.

Now I know my life's partner only partially as I am known only partially, but we are growing in our ability to understand, accept and love each other as, layer by layer, we peel away our masks to expose our inner selves.

I CORINTHIANS 13 FOR COUPLES (cont'd)

So now abideth faith, hope and married love, these three. The faith may be the belief that your children will turn out all right in spite of the many problems and struggles of growing up. The hope may be that we will live some day in a world without war, hunger, disease, divorce and many other things which build walls between people. But greater than faith and hope is love because smile by smile, dialogue by dialogue, hug by hug, reaching out to touch another person or couple, married love can be one of God's instruments in making this the kind of world He wants it to be.

Robert Gossett is pastor of First United Methodist Church in Brillion, Wisc.. He and his wife were encountered in 1982 and are the parents of two children.

OUR SEX - ROUTINE OR REFRESHING

Just as we can become bored with our relationship with our dialogue, we can also become bored with our sexual relationship. But just as in our dialogue, our sex life may be routine and dull because of our attitudes and prejudices that we have developed over the years. We need to point out in this presentation, that there are usually much deeper feelings associated with our sexual relationship than we usually admit. Many time this realization will make a difference between a routine or a refreshing sex life.

I. Definition of sex and sexuality.

- A. Sex is a part of our total personhood.
- B. Sexuality is the way we act out our role of being male or female.

II. Share how we see our sexual relationship.

- A. Before our weekend.
 - 1. Share the attitudes we brought into our marriage about sex - can include how we talked about sex in our families. Be positive as well as negative.
 - 2. Tell how our attitudes developed during our married years.
- B. After our weekend.
 - 1. Share our attitudes about sex since our weekend. What are our values and attitudes now? Has there been a big change, or are we still working on them? How does our present attitudes and values affect our relationship?
 - 2. Share how we may see sex as an activity or some “thing” we do.

III. Parallel with dialogue.

- A. Share how we are beginning to realize that sex can be used in the same way we can use dialogue - to grow closer and become more aware of the person I am married to.
- B. How we can see dialogue and sex as just an activity, or as a way of sharing ourselves with each other as another form of communication.
- C. Share how much more meaningful both can be when we are open and honest with each other.
- D. Share how we realized why our trust in one another is sex wasn't equal to the trust in our dialogue.
 - 1. We practice dialogue consciously - obeying rules and guidelines.
 - 2. We are more aware of goals of dialogue than goals of sex.
 - 3. Dialogue is a new technique - we learned it fresh.
 - 4. We bring a lot of our Modern World training into our sex life.

IV. Refreshing our routine.

- A. Share some of the ways you have refreshed your dialogue, and parallel this with your sex routine.
 - 1. Being more accepting and honest.
 - 2. Daring to trust our spouse.
 - 3. Trying different methods, times, places.
 - 4. Concentrating on spouse's goodness.
 - 5. Bringing the romance back into our sex life.

OUR SEX - ROUTINE OR REFRESHING (cont'd)

B. Share your joy and enthusiasm concerning your hope for your new dialogue and sexual relationship.

V. Dialogue Question: How do I see myself in our sexual relationship? HDMAMMF?

VI. Open Sharing Question: What are some of the ways we've used to refresh our sexual relationship?

Questions to consider to help develop this presentation:

1. What do I see as our sexual relationship: is it an activity to perform when the kids are asleep and the lights out, or is it the total way I respond to my spouse? Discuss with each other.
2. How did my family talk about sex as I grew up? How did that affect my attitudes coming into marriage?
3. In what way am I least open to you in our sexual relationship? What are the masks I wear and how do they limit me in our sexual relationship? (the aggressor, the martyr, the passive pleaser, the expert or know it all, etc.)

OUR CHILDREN'S SELF IMAGE - HOW WE EFFECT IT

In this presentation we hope to look at ourselves deeply and gain some insight into our own self-image. Once we've done that, we can look at how our own self-image affects that of our children. We can hopefully encourage the other couples to look at their own self rejection and sense of personal inadequacy and then go on to see how that carries over to their relationship with their children. If, however, we are preachy in this presentation, we won't be nearly as effective as if we share ourselves, openly and honestly and encourage the couples to look at themselves in the same way. We want to encourage them by sharing the joys we've found when we tried it.

I. What is Self-Image?

A. Share the masks I wear.

1. Definition of a mask

A mask is a way of behaving; a pattern of my activities. We wear masks because through them we see our own value, our acceptability to others.

2. What is the mask I wear?

Keep the name of the mask general and choose one which is readily identifiable to others, such as masculinity, femininity, good provider, good mother, intellectualizer, martyr, good listener, friendly neighbor, busy person, nice guy, peacemaker, etc. Be cautious not to describe mask in terms of personal qualities; rather describe how I act when I wear this mask. Give specific examples of my own actions so that the way I wear this mask is apparent to those listening.

B. How our masks affect our couple relationship.

1. Share how our mask limits us from being open and accepting in our couple relationship.

2. Share how we have seen that we can choose to overcome some of our mask's limitations and reach out to each other to be more open and honest.

II. How our masks affect our relationship with our children.

A. Limitations

Share how our masks have limited us in our relationship with our children. This may include not being open, friendly, or giving when the situation really called for it. Or it may be giving too much to the exclusion of self and spouse because our mask demanded it. Use personal examples.

B. Share our children's developing masks.

1. How are they related to, or opposed to our masks? Name the mask, briefly describe it?

2. How do they help the child see his/her self-worth and acceptability?

3. What are some of the limitations?

OUR CHILDREN'S SELF IMAGE - HOW WE EFFECT IT (cont'd)

III. Joys of being open and honest.

- A. Share specific instances of closeness we have had recently with our children. Try to make this an instance that we have reflected our children's goodness and allowed them to see that we love them for just being themselves.
- B. Share the dream we have for our children and how far we've come in efforts to make that dream a reality.

IV. Dialogue Question: What is the mask I wear and how does that affect our children? HDMAMMF?

V. Open Sharing Question: Please share some of the instances of joy and closeness you've felt recently with your children by reflecting their own goodness to them.

COUPLE DYNAMICS – TOLERATION OR CHANGE

We want to show our urgency for the importance of coupleness and the uplifting experience of trying to live God's Plan. We do this, not by tolerating ourselves and our spouse, but by being willing and open to change ourselves and accept our spouse. The reward is the more visible our couple relationship the more we experience the closeness and presence in our love for each other.

I. Relationship – Since our Weekend

- A. Toleration: coupleness is more than a nice way to live together. We can "get along" with each other by not rocking the boat. Going along rather than facing an issue and therefore becoming involved.
- B. Change: God's investment in us - His Plan. Give examples of change - how we reach out to one another and decide to love and therefore grow.

II. Dialogue - the tool to institute change. How to use this tool:

- A. When we dialogue, whether it's conscious or not, we change. Explain how this is true for you.
- B. Give personal examples of how change occurs over a period of time and we actually have to look back to realize that there has been any.
- C. Personally state how real change is not an overnight thing. Things that come gradually are more permanently etched with in us.

III. Decision to Love.

Not giving "up" or "in", but just giving – understanding - this is how change occurs.

- A. Trust your spouse
Personal examples of how you trust and reach out and decide to love - change.
- B. Acceptance
 - 1. Share how it is a two way street - there is change on both sides. How we must accept change of others even if we don't agree with that change.
 - 2. Give a personal example of how this is true in your own relationship.

IV. Dialogue Question: In what ways do I tolerate myself rather than change for you? HDMAMMF?

V. Open Sharing Question: Share with us your urgency or reasons for wanting to be a couple.

COMMUNITY NIGHT

I. Introduction (2 min.)

- A. Who you are, where you're from, how long married and encountered?
- B. Explain format of the evening, and the ending time.

II. Presentations

- A. Write a love letter - (10 min)
Dialogue question: What difficult feeling would I like to share with you? DFILD.
By difficult, we mean:
 - 1. Difficult accepting it myself.
 - 2. Difficult in sharing it with my spouse.
- B. Pass out copies of sample "love Letter" and ask all couples to comment on what's wrong with it. (attachment #1) (10 min,) (Note: if group is too large, divide into smaller groups for this part.)
- C. Presentation on feelings (see attachment #2) (10 min)
- D. Presentation on Garbage Dumping (see attachment #3) (20 min)

III. Question and Answer Time - (15 min)

IV. Private workshop (10 min)

Couples now workshop or rewrite original love letter, "What difficult feeling would I like to share with you? DFILD."

V. Dialogue (10 min)

Couples now exchange love letters and dialogue with their spouse.

Community Night

ATTACHMENT No.1

Tonight I want to share with you the way I felt yesterday afternoon. Johnny was playing in the bookcase, and you scolded him in a pretty-harsh manner, and I was really puzzled and angry. I don't feel he deserved to be talked to like that, and it really hurt me. It put me in a tough spot because I don't want to see him hurt. I want him to love you and I want to protect him. At the same time, I don't want to put you down in front of him. So, please, for my sake and his, be a little more gentle with him.

I love you
Your wife.

Community Night

ATTACHMENT No. 2

I. What is a feeling vs. a thought or judgment?

- A. A feeling is a natural, inner, instantaneous response to situations, people and events. A feeling is my natural, human response to life. They are morally neutral. Only my reactions and judgments to those feelings are good or bad, right or wrong. But my feelings just are! They are a vital part of me. They reveal who I am in a deeper way than practically anything else about me. My feelings influence my daily life. the way I speak, respond, love, accept and forgive. My feelings are a clear expression of what is going on inside me.
- B. Share now any struggle you may have to keep your Love Letter on a feeling level.
 - 1. Write I "feel" when I should write I "think".
 - 2. Often-use "feeling" words that in reality are judgments such as: I "feel" guilty; or unloved; or inadequate. It is impossible to actually dialogue on these examples as they are judgments I have made about myself. My spouse may -know these judgments to be wrong. He or she knows that I am indeed not inadequate. The actual feeling words should be used: ashamed for guilty; small for inadequate; lonely for unloved.
- C. Mental check to see if I've shared a feeling or a judgment.
 - 1. If it makes sense to substitute the words "I think I'm... then it is a judgment, For example: I feel/think I'm guilty.
 - 2. If it does not make sense when making this substitution, then it is a feeling, For example: I feel/think I'm ashamed.

II. How to describe a feeling

- A. The first step is to decide on the one feeling you wish to share in the love letter. (Share any struggle you may have in recognizing your own feeling.) The feeling can usually be described in one word such as happy, sad, scared, nervous, ashamed.
- B. Now the rest of the love letter can be spent describing the intensity of that one feeling. It's the intensity that is continually making happy a different feeling. A little trick to help the pen get going is to write down "I feel happy (or sad or ashamed) like... The word "like" has committed you to go on to further describe the feeling.
- C. Sources for describing the feeling
 - 1. The five senses; SIGHT (I feel sad like a bassett hound looks); TASTE (I feel excited like waiting for a watermelon to be opened); TOUCH (I feel calm like the smoothness of a baby's bottom); SMELL (I feel scared like smelling smoke in the garage); HEARING (I feel upset like the sound of a one-man-band playing a Minute Waltz).
 - 2. Past experiences shared as a couple : (I feel calm like the morning stillness of the lake by our vacation cabin). Avoid individual experiences that you spouse may find impossible to relate to:(I feel scared like the time I was on the roof and almost fell)

III. Conclude by hitting the high points in your presentation

Community Night

ATTACHMENT No. 3

PRESENTATION ON GARBAGE DUMPING

I. Definition

- A. Mentioned on our Weekend (Share your thoughts and feelings on maybe a troubled feeling like "Do I have bad breath? I really can't tell.")
- B. Key indicator to identifying Garbage Dumping - always described as a difficult feeling
 - 1. Garbage Dumping is a self-centered encounter with self that is given to spouse under guise of "love letter". Intent is to make spouse aware of feeling not for spouse to take on the feeling.
 - 2. In Garbage Dumping I share a feeling I won't share outside of dialogue. The rules of dialogue say my spouse must just accept my feeling, no judging/criticizing
 - 3. Briefly share any examples of Garbage Dumping in your dialogue explain why you judge it is Garbage Dumping.
- C. Focus of Garbage Dumping.
 - 1. If sharing is motivated by personal need to feel relieved, soothed, healed, forgiven etc., it's Garbage Dumping.
 - 2. Forces spouse to act as father confessor, psychologists and healer, not as a lover.

II. Effects - Some of the couples may be asking, "What's so wrong about opening myself up like that? Anything that allows my spouse to know me better will improve our marriage! Openness to spouse is openness to God - and God already knows about me and my garbage - so should my spouse."

- A. Proper time and place for Garbage Dumping
 - 1. Dialogue is the time to share feelings with spouse, and the written love letter is part of how we do that.
 - 2. In dumping my spouse may decide I didn't trust enough to share outside the dialogue.
 - 3. It's okay to write a Garbage Dumping to spouse, just don't call it a love letter and try to use it for dialogue.
- B. How much Garbage Dumping?
 - 1. Kind of like being overweight '50 lbs. is too much maybe even 20 lbs. but is 10 lbs?
 - 2. Garbage Dumping is the dead-end road for dialogue. It puts the burden of how I feel on my spouse. It's manipulative in that it forces spouse to reassure, heal, forgive outside dialogue. This is okay, but it's not the purpose of dialogue.
- C. Share some examples of GD from your own dialogue that occurred because of barriers in-your relationship in specific areas.
 - 1. Money, sex, discipline etc.
 - 2. Result will be to start building barriers in dialoguing relationship, too.
 - 3. Dialogue is a conscious decision to love based on confidence. Garbage Dumping destroys the confidence.

PRESENTATION ON GARBAGE DUMPING (cont'd)

III. Cure

- A. Simple, on paper. The focus of the writing is for my spouse to actually experience my feeling, for us to achieve a unity.
- B. How?
 1. Keep focus on spouse when writing, maybe start with TNT (The Nicest Thing your spouse did for you this day.) Helps put focus on spouse or keep a mental picture of spouse as you write.
 2. Share how your own relationship has changed since dialogue (new closeness, openness, trust).
 3. Take an honest look at the question selected for the writing and your motivation or focus
 4. Start working on those barriers in your daily relationship. We can do this because we know love is a decision. (Share any examples where you have reached out to spouse in these areas and how you felt.)

MISSION - VISION - VALUES

We have been hearing a lot recently about the MISSION, VISION and VALUES of our Movement. The words are repeated so often and so glibly that it makes you wonder whether it is really understood. In fact, there are numerous people who have confessed candidly that they have been afraid, or ashamed to admit that they do not understand exactly what it all means, for fear that they might be judged poorly. There may be a number of us who do not have it clearly in our minds, so we are going to try to define it a bit. "Define" that means put it down on paper as definitely as possible - and try to fine tune it.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter is a movement in the Church. It was not intended originally to be a movement. When Fr. Calvo designed the weekend he called "A Marriage Encounter", he meant it to be simply an experience, like a couples' retreat, a service to be presented by the Christian Family Movement. He did not intend the Marriage Encounter to become a movement itself. That happened after it had been brought to the United States.

We didn't understand the call nor the mission right from the beginning. That is something that grew and was clarified through the experience we had individually, the dream that was born in our own hearts, the call we heard from each other and experienced together. All of those things awakened us to the possibility.

The sense of mission developed through the experience of sharing the-Weekend with others, the conversion to God's plan, and then the bright awareness of Sacrament and Apostleship. The first group of couples and priests grew into a "people". We had a prophet, Fr. Chuck Gallagher, who articulated the vision and we followed the dream together. It was a moment of renewal within the Church the fathers of Vatican II had solemnly promulgated "Mumen Gentium", the Constitution on the Church. We discovered our place in that divine scheme. Worldwide Marriage Encounter I became a movement of the people of God.

A people without a vision is not a people - it's a herd. A movement without a mission is not a movement, it's a trend. We are not a trend in the Church. We are a movement of the people of God.

The VISION of World Wide Marriage Encounter is the vision of the Church. We have been expressing it for years in the words: "We can change the world". It is the vision Jesus came to proclaim: the Gospel vision. Jesus came to renew the world; to remake it into the Kingdom of God. We know that before that can happen, the world must be changed. And only HE can change it.

But redemption was not completed when Jesus preached the Good News; when He died on the Cross; when He rose from the dead. The Good News had been announced by Jesus. It had been validated by His passion and death and by His resurrection it was activated by Pentecost. But it is not completed yet. Jesus wants to complete it through US. We are His Risen Body. It is IN us and THROUGH us that He wants to change the world. That is the VISION of Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

MISSION - VISION – VALUES (cont'd)

As a movement, we have been called by Christ through the Church to a definite MISSION: to renew the Sacrament of Matrimony in and for the Church. Let us quote from Archbishop Hunthausen's pastoral letter on the Sacrament of Matrimony: "The sacred vocation of the Sacrament of Matrimony is to be a Channel of God's grace for the-renewal of the Church in our times. There can be no renewal of the Church without the renewal of family life. And there can be no renewal of family life without the renewal of the matrimonial couples who make up the heart of our families". That is the specific MISSION that we have been called to: to renew the Sacrament of Matrimony in and for the Church. And it is a GLORIOUS one!!!

We realize that mission through a ministry that is focused on our Marriage Encounter Weekend. By presenting and supporting the weekend experience, we introduce married couples to the sacramentality of their relationship and their minds and hearts are opened to a deep personal conversion. They are invited to embrace an alternate lifestyle that leads to personal and couple renewal, to shared life in community and apostleship in the Church, all of which contributes to the renewal of the Church.

Not everyone who experiences the Weekend progresses through all those steps. The people who accept and live the VALUES of the Weekend do and become truly part of the movement through their lifestyle. They live in a deeply responsible relationship rooted in open intimate communication that is vitalized by an awareness of being Sacrament. That inevitably leads to Apostleship in the Church. These are four basic VALUES of the movement: RESPONSIBLE RELATIONSHIP; INTIMATE COMMUNICATION; LIVING AWARENESS OF SACRAMENT; AND APOSTLESHIP. these, in turn, are fleshed out by ancillary values, among which are Dialogue, Listening, Responsive Love, Tender Trust, Openness to God's Plan, Prayerful Communication with God, Reevaluation and ongoing Conversion of Heart and the Need for others in their lives.

'The VISION: To Change the World.

The MISSION: To Renew the Sacrament of Matrimony in and for the Church.

The VALUES: Responsible Relationship: Intimate Communication, Living Sacrament, and Apostleship in the church.

If we are impassioned by the Dream and seriously try to live the Mission, we cannot help but be PASSIONATE about the Sacrament of Matrimony, in which case, we will necessarily be immensely successful in inviting couples and priests to the Weekend; the beginning of the journey. It will be a compulsion with us.

And the world will be better for this

JULY - 1985

FORMS OF BEHAVIOR IN REGARDS TO FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- OWL:** I know what should be done and how finances should be handled. Experienced and up to date. My expertise in this area benefits others.
- SQUIRREL:** I am thrifty and can stretch the dollar. Others benefit because I can come up with the needed funds as a result of being so careful. I also keep little amounts stored in a number of places in case of an emergency. I am prepared for the unexpected.
- PEACOCK:** I am proud of the way that I handle things. I am very open to sharing my approach and my skills with others. I am patient and will teach others so that they can improve in this area.
- OSTRICH:** I live with my head in the sand much of the time. Others seem open to dealing with this area; therefore, I see little need to be involved. My behavior frees others to exercise their talents.
- GIRAFFE:** With my long neck, I can be the “overseer” of the situation. I can see the broad picture. My vision creates an atmosphere that is conducive to dreaming. I generate the ideas and watch others handle the implementation.
- TURTLE:** I am consistent in my journey of financial stewardship. I like to take one meaningful step at a time. Too much change at one time overloads my circuits and I retreat to the safety of my shell. I keep my confusion and uncertainty to myself and others, benefit because I do not burden them.
- DONKEY:** I am relatively set in my ways of doing things. Others have reflected that my ways are good and so my experience tends to influence how I handle things. I am strong willed and others tend to feel secure with the strength of my convictions.
- KANGAROO:** I am safe and secure in the pouch of financial security. I am also generous with what I have. I get nervous and unsure when things are financially tight or when I am in financial need.
- HYENA:** I have the attitude that finances are a necessary part of life, however, when they warrant a lot of time and energy I get irritated. I believe that when money is taken too seriously there is less time for building relationship. Others benefit from this attitude as I am able to remind them of the things in life that are really important.
- RACCOON:** I approach finances with a "bandit approach" I tend to rob Peter to pay Paul. Others benefit from this behavior as I am most often capable of coming up with the money that is needed.
- RABBIT:** I am quick, alert and aware. I have the gift of coming to decisions rather quickly. I am quick to react to financial concerns, needs &/or opportunities. I am willing to take risks in regards to investments when I am pretty sure that it is sound.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

“Do you love me?” asks the burly father of five daughters, Tevye, in the musical “Fiddler on the Roof.” Directing the question toward Golde, his wife of 25 years, he’s not at all sure. You get the impression that his daughters’ new found relationships have shaken his perspective on his own. After a dramatic “Do I What?” the obviously-unprepared -for-this-kind-of-question Golde makes a reply: “For 25 years I’ve washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house...” “But do you love me?” returns Tevye to the original question.

You and I both know that love is far more than the mere carrying out of day to day chores. Married love is far more than the mere provision of the material benefits of a home. But the interchange between Tevye and his wife suggests that it is more and yet it is every bit all of that. In other words, love between a husband and a wife ought to be charged with some real, live emotion and passion and yet it should not be embarrassed to acknowledge the daily work that is required to keep it alive. Dinner on the table, no matter who does the cooking, is a medium through which love can reveal itself in any relationship.

When Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” he made it clear that loving him meant “feeding his sheep,” not a mere emotional, internal reaction but a tangible, demonstrative living out of one’s compassion and sensitivity. Married love requires no less. Husband and wife, together, must seek ways to daily demonstrate their love by helping to feed each other where they hunger the most. A relationship without God may be the hungriest of them all.

If you’re looking for love in the flickering of candles and the sweet smell of perfume you may be missing the love that waits for you in the dishpan or laundry basket that you share with your husband or wife. If you’re looking for love in romantic, I’ve-fallen-in-love feelings that you remember from your youth you may be missing the longer lasting love that is found in wrestling through angry, hurt feelings and the sharing of deeply hidden-away needs. If you’re looking for the illusory love that’s in the fun, you may be missing the more complete and abiding love that’s in the work. There in the midst of all the labor is a relationship waiting for you to say, “Yes, I love you. Let me count the ways.”

Alvin J Horton

HINTS FOR THOSE RUNNING AFTER SELF-WORTH

- ❖ Be open about your discouragement and pain.
- ❖ Be open about disappointment.
- ❖ Be open about tiredness.
- ❖ Be open about fears and doubts.
- ❖ Stop proving that you are perfect.
- ❖ Stop proving that you are irreproachable.
- ❖ Stop proving that you are right.
- ❖ Stop blaming others for everything.
- ❖ Start asking to be loved.
- ❖ Start asking for help and advice.
- ❖ Start asking for and giving forgiveness.
- ❖ Start affirming others.

HINTS FOR THOSE RUNNING AFTER LOVE

- ❖ Express clearly your desires, hopes, expectations, preferences and plans.
- ❖ Express clearly your fear of rejection.
- ❖ Stop discounting your feelings.
- ❖ Stop avoiding conflict to get peace at any price.
- ❖ Stop giving double messages,
- ❖ Stop asking for forgiveness too easily.
- ❖ Stop hiding behind pain or hurt.
- ❖ Start taking responsibility for your commitments.
- ❖ Don't allow yourself to be controlled by your negative image.

FEELINGS, THE VITAL SIGNS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

The main point of this presentation is that we've discovered a new dimension to our relationship as we share our feelings with each other. There is more to our relationship than just discussing our thoughts and judgments. Sharing our feelings has given us the insight into our spouse that has allowed us to grow closer as a couple, and to grow as individuals. It's the feelings that we have under all our masks and exterior reactions that pin-point who we really are. The joys of this discovery are what keeps our relationship a vital, growing one.

I. Share new ideas you have learned about feelings since your weekend.

- A. Definition of a feeling: a feeling is a spontaneous inner reaction to a person, place or situation.
- B. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. There is no morality to feelings.
- C. We are all unique. My feelings are the core of who I am.
- D. Husband and wife may often think alike in the same situation, but their feelings can be very different (give personal example).

II. Ways you've learned to describe feelings.

- A. "I think" versus "I feel" rule.
- B. My feelings are not the same as my spouses even if we use the same word to describe it.
 - 1. The same word may identify different feelings.
 - 2. Feelings can be of different intensities and hues.
- C. How we've been able to find a feeling behind a feeling.
 - 1. We can recognize the surface feelings such as joy or anger fairly quickly.
 - 2. To discover more about our feelings, we can ask ourselves what other feelings are associated with this, or how does feeling this way make me feel.
- D. How we describe our feelings in loving detail so our spouse can understand them.
 - 1. We can use physical sensations. (give example)
 - 2. We can use past experiences we have shared together (example)
 - 3. We can use our senses, sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing.
 - 4. Other kinds of description.
 - 5. We only use the types of examples in describing feelings that are relatable to both of us.

III. Importance of feelings to our marriage.

- A. Share some of the differences you have seen in your relationship when we share feelings and when we share thoughts. Give personal examples.
- B. Share the joys you've experienced from sharing feelings. Give personal examples.
 - 1. Growth you've seen in your couple relationship.
 - 2. Growth you've seen in yourself.
 - 3. Confidence you've gained to share feelings in formerly "touchy" areas.
 - 4. Closeness you've experienced from sharing feelings.

IV. Dialogue Question: What feelings do I have that I find most difficult to share? HDIF writing this to you?

V. Sharing Question: What are some of the ways I've found to better express my feelings?

LIVING OUT OUR LOVE

ROMANCE, ADVENTURE, DARING RESCUES, UNDERCOVER WORK

Headline for a new movie? Not exactly. But it could be if the movie was titled, "This Is Our Life". For many of us, the Weekend gives a chance to look at our marriage as a great love story. We found optimism, and hope in each other. A chance to look at life with a smile in our eyes. We took each other in our arms and embraced the idea of really living life.

Every movie has a location, a place where it is filmed. We soon found that the location of our love adventure was not a safe, warm Weekend. All too soon, it was children, meals, jobs, cars that broke, toilets that overflowed, strange looks from friends, family, children who questioned our sanity. And there were serious doubts when HE always wanted to pick sex questions for dialogue and SHE knew that finances was a better area.

Too quickly and easily our relationship began to sound more like a weather report than high adventure. Today, sunny and mild; long, hot spell forecast; cloudy with partial sunshine; overcast and rainy; temperatures dropping; cold snap coming; start of new ice age?

SOUNDS FAMILIAR, DOESN'T IT? It's a pretty common experience for all of us, The "slings and arrows" of reality sure can hurt. We were really lucky, before it got too bad to fix, some crazy, loving couple plopped themselves down, smack in our pool of disillusionment and doubt, and said, "Tell us, how's your dialogue?" Surprisingly, they didn't quite buy in to our rapid-fire "fine" answers. So, we wound up talking about relationship, the dream of the Weekend that seemed to be fading. We talked about happiness and joy, sometimes hurts and doubts. In hearing the story of their relationships we came to understand more about us. That our romance is a dynamic event. Never one thing or the other exclusively,

Marriage truly is a journey; and the Sacrament of Matrimony is the story of that journey, lived out and told for others. The whole world needs story tellers. But, for those of us who have made a Weekend, there is a special need because "No one can dialogue alone".

MENTALITY:

Our marital relationship is a living process that will take the rest of our lives to complete. Happiness, joy, unity do not happen once and for always, but are a continuing goal, a very real daily struggle.

Most often, we talk only about the "nice" images of our marriage: closeness, peace and joy. These images of Sacramental Marriage are important, but are incomplete. Unless we speak openly and honestly about the more ambiguous experiences of marriage, experiences of anger, frustration, misunderstanding, we leave many of our couples believing their marriages are somehow failing. We need to share how we are attempting to recognize areas of conflict and deal with these issues and feelings in ways that strengthen the bonds between us rather than destroy them.

ROMANCE, ADVENTURE, DARING RESCUES, UNDERCOVER WORK (cont'd)

The Sacramental significance of our marriages is founded in the concept of Unity. Unity is the goal of our attempts to move from an "I" mentality towards "we," as two people who hold life in common.

God's plan is NOT predestination; we were not mysteriously pre-selected for one another. For encountered couples, the Sacrament of Matrimony involves striving for Unity by living out our wedding vows: to love, honor and cherish the other in sickness and health, good times and bad, till death parts us.

As we try to live out this commitment to each other, our lives are a sign of the most profound truth of existence: the love of God which Jesus reveals is complete and irrevocable. Jesus is the absolute evidence that God does not love tentatively and conditionally. Our love, in response to this example, is to be complete and unshakable. This is the vision we hold for our marriage. But, total and unconditional love is something we have to strive

HOPED FOR OUTCOME:

We want our couples to realize the strength and value they are to each other and to the church. This is a talk about each of us as couples on our journey.

DEVELOPING YOUR SHARING:

The simple but important thing you have to share is your realization that how you are living with one another is exactly what you offer the church. This does not mean we have to be perfect United Methodists nor perfect couples. What is needed then is for couples to begin to see how important their daily living and loving is to each other and others.

ROMANCE, ADVENTURE, DARING RESCUES, UNDERCOVER WORK (cont'd)

OUTLINE

- I. This talk is our lives; who we really are.** Crazy, romantic, happy conflicting, sometimes sad, but WE ARE A COUPLE BECAUSE WE CHOOSE TO BE. (10 min)
 - A. We are a Sacramental Sign, a matrimonial couple. True joy is in your arms. In what ways have we seen our happiness and hope for a better life influence those around us? How did I feel knowing we were a source of joy and peace for someone? (Specific example)
 - B. God's love is believable to the world to the extent that we share our love for each other. Think back to a time when you were in disillusionment with each other; experiencing loneliness and hurt. How do you think your behavior affected others? What specific examples can you give? Contrast this experience with, "What are your feelings about it now?" What does this contrast tell us about how our relationship in marriage directly affects the church?
 - C. The flesh and blood experience of our Sacrament is found in our daily living in our kitchens and bedrooms. Relate how we are living. Not perfection, sunshine and roses; but the facts of trying -- successes and failures. We are on a journey, not yet complete.
 - D. Wedding vows -- refer to our wedding vows. What do they mean? How does thinking about our commitment to each other influence our DAILY lives -- both the pros and cons: sometimes easy, difficult, decisions to be involved. How does our daily dialogue relate to our commitment?
- II. Matrimony is an ongoing process; married people are experiencing the dimensions of the Sacrament throughout their relationship in EVERY aspect of their daily lives. (5 minutes).**
 - A. Wedding Day - call from Church for Church - the call to be involved with each other and other encountered couples means our marriage is not a private matter. How does this affect me? How do we live this out?
 - B. Sign value to the rest of the world of the tender bond Christ has for His church. Can a couple though separated by time and distance, still be a Sacramental Sign? How? Are we a Sacramental Sign just because we do things together? Why? Why not? From this contrast what can we say about "tenderness of heart and mind" versus shared activities as a sign of Christ's love? How have I been Christ-like in my commitment to my spouse? If I have to ask, what does that tell me? What specific changes in attitude and behavior do I have to make? Why? What effect do I think those changes will have on the people around me? What motivates me to try to change? What support will I need from my spouse?
- III. What are these awarenesses calling us to? (5 minutes)**
 - A. Our belief in the extra-ordinary reality of our Sacrament, and our reverence for our coupleness.
 - B. Promise of a way of life within our church -- fantastic potential. Our basic challenge is taking the Weekend home and living it, We seem to forget two very crucial elements: God's Plan for us in our marriage is Unity; and dialogue is a TOOL we use to become closer.

ROMANCE, ADVENTURE, DARING RESCUES, UNDERCOVER WORK (cont'd)

IV. Dialogue Question: In what specific ways do I see you being tender and compassionate toward me? Describe in full and loving detail.

V. Open Sharing Question: Name three people who most influenced my life and describe how. In what specific ways can I share the gifts they gave me with others? What prevents me from doing so?

VI. Closing Prayer:

"The Church is in your hands. You have declared your consent before God and man. May God look upon you with favor and grant you the grace to sustain you."

Related Questions for dialogue and discussion in preparing for this presentation:

1. Have we grown careless, taking each other for granted? HDMAMMF?
2. Am I too involved with my work? HDMAMMF?
3. Am I interested enough in his work? In her work? HDMAMMF?
4. Is our relationship with in-laws a thorny issue? Why? HDMAMMF?
5. Do we easily share our inner feelings, both when we are happy and when we are hurt, when we are upset and when we are content? HDMAMMF?
6. Do disagreements become arguments, then battles, then wars? HDMAMMF?
7. Do we, at those times, often shout or swear or say vicious things? HDMAMMF?
8. Have we been willing to forgive? Have I? HDMAMMF?
9. Do we always make up before going to bed? HDMAMMF?
10. Has our sexual life been satisfying? If not, have we discussed it honestly and tried to improve? HDMAMMF?
11. Are we too self-centered as a family, not concerned enough about other families, about the church, about the community in which we live? HDMAMMF?
12. Have we been good parents, loving, firm, understanding? Have I? HDMAMMF?
13. If a stranger walked into our home, would they know we are Christian? Does it make any difference? HDMAMMF?
14. Does the example we give lead our children to the Lord or take them away from Him? HDMAMMF?
15. Am I willing to begin again, to try harder, to give more? In what specific ways? HDMAMMF?

TOWARD A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP

All of us owe it to ourselves to discuss and discover various aspects of our relationships at the deepest levels of intimacy and understanding. These ideas and thoughts are presented for that purpose, not necessarily for writing a presentation.

* In the letters of John, we find the words: "We for our part have crossed over from death to life. This we know, because we love . . ."

Dialogue Question: What do these words, from our long ago brother, say about our relationship? HDMAMMF?

Discussion After Dialogue:

1. In what specific ways have I been life-giving to you this week?
2. How have I seen you being life-giving to me?
3. What one way can I best show my love for you in the coming week?

How do we lose our relationship? Before our Weekend, we pretty much lived our lives in a form of isolation from others. To be sure, we were a part of each other and the world around us, but there was always a distance, a separation. When faced with problems or tensions, we tend to look within ourselves for the answer, for hope, for relief, not finding anything, we often retreated into self-imposed isolation, nursing our hurts, hiding our despair, denying our anxiety, "toughing" it out.

Even now, we very frequently get all caught up in the same kind of circular thought process that defeats us before we've even started: "All those other couples who made a Weekend seem happy and loving. I don't feel very happy, certainly don't feel excited about us the way "they" are. There must be something wrong with me."

Psychologically, we don't handle internal feelings and judgments of self-doubt, guilt, failed expectations very well. So, we rationalize them away. "The Weekend didn't work for us." "We don't need that touching-hand holding stuff." "We communicate; who needs dialogue?" "Dialogue is so artificial; it's like planning to have sex."

Dialogue Question: How did I feel the last time I shared a personal feeling of self-doubt or inadequacy with you? Describe in full and loving detail.

Discussion After Dialogue:

1. How do I react to problems or tension that come from outside our relationship?
2. Do I see any value in sharing these with you?
3. Do you see any value in me sharing my problems and concerns with you?
4. What does this discussion show us about the needs of other couples?
5. What one specific couple most needs to hear this part of our story? When?

TOWARD A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP (cont'd)

Who do we belong to? Take some time here for a shared reflection before dialogue. What could I say, or how could I describe our family, so a complete stranger would know we belong together?

Dialogue Question: What is the most important aspect of "belonging" for me? HDMAMMF?

Discussion After Dialogue:

1. Would I describe us as "belonging" to our church in the same way as we belong to each other? To all Christian people?
2. What words or phrases would I use to describe our relationship with Christians now?
3. Why did I choose those answers?
4. If belonging to our family creates warmth, affection, a sense of being needed and cherished, what do I think our Christian people most need from the two of us as a couple right now?
5. What specific way will we live this awareness out during the next two weeks?

Remember the words from the Weekend: Rejection, toleration, acceptance? Essentially, there are two kinds of relationships between people. For lack of a better term, we can call one commercial; the other intimate. Think about the last time you had dealings with a service attendant, a mechanic, or a cash register operator. What were your thoughts, other than, "What's it going to cost?" A commercial or transaction type relationship involves bartering or exchanging something I've got for something you've got. Usually, my motivation is to get all I can for me out of the deal with no real regard for the other person. Intimate relationships develop from trust, freedom from conditions, and an understanding of another person. Dialogue, reaching for acceptance of feelings, is one of the surest ways to develop the bonds of intimacy. As I gradually become able to accept and actually experience the feelings of my partner, I also accept without condition the person.

Dialogue Question: Considering the above, how would I describe our relationship the majority of times? My commitment to knowing you through our dialogue? HDMAMMF?

Discussion After Dialogue: Why are we here? What do we hope to gain? How?

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

Approached with openness and curiosity, scripture dialogue can become another way to open new windows in our couple relationship. For some, approaching scripture with the aim of dialoguing on it, may be like a journey into the unknown, and while that may be scary, it can also be fruitful! At first we may hesitate because of unfamiliarity with scripture. We may have regarded scripture as a historical work about other people and other times. We may have thought of scripture interpretation as being the province of "others", particularly pastors or biblical scholars. We may say to ourselves, "How can we dialogue on scripture? We're not biblical experts. We don't know enough about the Holy Land, Biblical times, or the way people lived then. We're afraid we'll interpret the passages wrong."

These apprehensions can be quickly overcome as we realize that scripture dialogue does not require such specialized knowledge. It is not a time for in-depth bible study, nor for theological discussion. Rather it is simply a time for sharing our personal feelings in response to a biblical passage, and our feelings are neither right nor wrong.

We may think of scripture as a love letter to us from God. As such it can sharpen our awareness of our covenant and stimulate us to grow in it. The Old Testament records Israel's experience as a covenant community to whom God reached out over and over with strong expressions of love. The response expected of Israel was their own repeated decision to love God and one another. The record of this covenant has come to us in biography, history, poetry, song, law, social criticism, prophecy, and parable.

In the New Testament those who experienced the Love of God as they walked with Jesus or later in the community of the early church, reached out in Gospels, songs, letters, sermons, etc. to share that Love. As we read our scripture, we are experiencing the love of those faith communities being poured out on us - a love that ultimately comes from God.

In a sense, scripture dialogue is our personal love letter written in response to God's love letter, and it can be an exciting adventure of expanding our mutual awareness of each other, in relation to some of the great themes of human experience.

The basics of scripture dialogue are:

1. Select a passage from scripture that is meaningful to you as a couple.
2. Read enough before and after that particular passage to be able to place your selection in context. Ask who is speaking? What happens before and after? What might the physical setting be? Why was this said or written? (motivation, occasion)
3. With one another, try to set the scene --- from the outside in.
 - a. Physical setting---time of day, indoors, outdoors, etc.
 - b. Emotional climate of the passage --- the atmosphere
 - c. Imagine yourself in the scene. What does the speaker or writer look like? Sound like? Where are you in the scene?

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE (cont'd)

4. Reread your particular passage.
5. Write your love letter immediately after setting the scene. The basic question for scripture dialogue is: "What are my feelings (hearing these words said to us as a couple?" Focus on your feelings.
6. Follow the WEDS dialogue technique for writing, exchange, dialogue and select. In your dialogue focus on responding to one another's love letter.
7. Discussion later could be focused on "What did these words mean to me?"

SELECT: We select a passage that holds promise of being fruitful for us. It may be something we both value and want to share more deeply. It may be one of the many sayings or teachings or actions of Jesus. It may be from one of the prophets, from Paul, from the Psalms or some of the other writings. A very good place to start is in the Gospels with the words of Jesus.

READ: We read it together or separately. We read twice." Once for the head and the second time for the heart. We try to listen for the emotional climate of the passage. How do we identify with the passage? Are we there as on-lookers, descendants, listeners, learners, participants? Can we imagine this scene in today's world? What is the physical setting, time of day, weather, how many people are present? What feelings arise in me as I read and reread this passage?

SET THE SCENE TOGETHER: The next step is to set the scene, and an important thing that we have to remember is that no two people perceive the same event the same way. When we as a couple set the scene together, we share with one another how we see it - neither one is right or wrong. There is no one right way! Since we are setting the scene for us as a couple, the way in which we individually see the scene becomes a blend. One of the difficulties was (and still is, at times) not spending enough time setting the scene. Setting the scene helps us to come alive - to feel and respond. If we skimp on setting the scene, we're really skimping on ourselves.

We've found it very beneficial to draw on our own life experiences in setting the scene for scripture dialogue - sharing a meal with close friends, a friend dropping in for coffee and sitting and talking intimately with us, walking along a beach or country road with close friends, or sailing in a boat with loved ones. All that we have experienced in our life is a rich source to help God's love letter come alive for us, and helps us to respond to God.

REREAD: Rereading the selection after setting the scene gives it a rich focus in preparation for writing.

WRITE: The basic question is, what are my feelings hearing these words said to us as a couple? We separate and write our love letters immediately. Our feelings are alive within us. If we wait to write until tomorrow, they will recede and we will be grasping, trying to recreate them in ourselves. So we write now.

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE (cont'd)

Focus on Feelings: How do I feel? How do I feel about my spouse? Our relationship? How do I feel about God - about Jesus - about Paul, etc.? What feelings have been stirred up in me? As we write, we allow ourselves to feel the atmosphere that we've just brought alive, and respond to it. One of the difficulties we've experienced in writing our love letters on scripture is when we focus on the meaning of Jesus' words, rather than on our feelings. When we intellectualize or analyze, rather than respond with our feelings.

EXCHANGE: When we come together to exchange, we pray that we will be open to hearing and responding to each other's feelings, and not become distracted into a discussion or analysis of scripture. We pray that we will respond to God's love for us as a couple by focusing on our relationship.

DIALOGUE: After reading each other's love letter twice, we focus our dialogue on the strongest feeling either of us felt in response to reading the letters or the strongest feeling expressed in the letters themselves.

SELECT: After ten minutes, we select our question for the next day, not necessarily another scripture.

DISCUSSION: Later discussion, perhaps around the table or while riding in the car, may focus on what the words reveal to us about God's intention for our lives, or how we can live these words. This is the time to probe what these words are supposed to mean, or what they mean to each of us now. In other words, the discussion time can center on all our thoughts and perceptions and wanderings related to the passage. Knowing that this discussion time can come later helps us limit our dialogue to feelings, without fear of missing out on some stimulating discussion later!

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE (cont'd)

CHOOSE ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE PASSAGES OR TRY ONE OF THESE:

Genesis 1:26-31 Creation of People
Genesis 2:24-25 A Man and Wife are united
Deuteronomy 30:11-14 The nearness of God's Law
Judges 11:29-40 The Daughter of Jephthah
I Samuel 3 The Lord appears to Samuel
I Kings 8:54-61 Solomon's Final Prayer
I Chronicles 29:10-19 David's Prayer of Thanksgiving
Song of Songs Any Section Love Poems
Psalm 19 Greatness of God and personal righteousness
Psalm 100 A Hymn of Praise
Psalm 150 Praise the Lord
Isaiah 43:18,19 Don't cling to the past
Jeremiah 17:5-8 Growing in a desert or by a stream
Matthew 4:1-11 Temptation of Jesus
Matthew 13:1-9 Parable of the Sower
Matthew 21:28-31 Parable of the Two Sons
Matthew 21:33-46 Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard
Mark 10:17-22 The Rich Man
Luke 6:37-42 Do not judge
Luke 10:25-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:38-42 Jesus Visits Mary and Martha
Luke 13:18-21 The Kingdom of God is like ----
Luke 14:34-35 Salt
Luke 24:28-32 Emaus Road
Luke 12:22-31 Trust in God
John 1:14-18 The Word became a Human Being
John 2:1-10 The Wedding in Cana
John 4:1-29 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
John 13:34-35 Love one another
John 14:1-7 I go to prepare a place for you
John 14:15-17 The Spirit
John 15:5-10 Vine and Branches
John 15:11-17 Friends
Mark 14:12-21
Matthew 26:17-30 Lord's Supper
Luke 22:1-23 -
I Corinthians 13 Love
II Corinthians 5:16-19 Never discouraged
Ephesians 5:21-33 Husbands and Wives
Philippians 2:1-11 The Attitudes of Christ we should emulate
Philippians 4:7-9 The Peace of God
I John 4:7-12 God is Love
I John 4:16-21 Why we love

FAMILY DIALOGUE

We believe that any family can try Family Dialogue with hope of some measure of success, by using the suggested helps and by avoiding the pitfalls described here. If the couple has a positive attitude toward the possibility of success in their own family with Family Dialogue, most probably it will work for them.

I. HOW OFTEN: From the experience of families from all over the-country, we've discovered that once a week is most worthwhile. It is -not law, however. Each family has its own wants and needs. We do know of a family that did dialogue every day for the time they were on a camping vacation and it was good. But generally, more frequently than once a week can be burdensome to families and can become a chore and destructive to family relationships. Less than once per week, it has been found, does not build trust. Family members lose touch with each other between times and any benefits that have been gained in the previous family dialogues can be lost.

II. THE WEDS OF FAMILY DIALOGUE: W - WRITE:

- A. Some families will find it most advantageous to write just before dialoguing, while others will be most successful with each member of the family writing at a time most convenient for him/her.
- B. Advantages to writing just before dialoguing: It is part of-the whole pattern (family assembles, perhaps prays and sets buzzer for ten minutes, writes and begins the dialogue'.) Another plus is that the feelings are most alive when they have just been written.
- C. Disadvantages to writing just before dialoguing: Too structured for some families. Also, some members of the family may choose to write when the spirit moves him/ her at another time.
- D. The love letter concept is most commonly thought to be a concept that develops within the children as time passes and as they become aware that their parents are writing in the form of a love letter. Forcing children to use the love letter seems to be a disadvantage in that it may cause more discord than if the children are given the freedom to write in whatever form they wish. Writing in some way is a must, though, with most all families, if family dialogue is to be a success.
- E. Children who are too young to write: They may draw pictures or dictate their letters to another member of the family. (Then during the reading, the words could either be whispered in the child's ear and then repeated out loud, or another member of the family could just read it for the child.)
- F. Feelings in the love letter: Not necessarily sticking to feelings when writing in the family seems to be an advantage. Unlike conjugal dialogue, where we write only feelings in our letters, but the family letters may contain thoughts, etc., but it should be carefully explained what feelings are and their importance as a core part of us. We could encourage them to write their feelings down and even make up a list of feelings words for them to refer to, but it seems best not to insist on strictly feelings or to correct them if they-give an opinion or belief, etc. It's important to-remember that family dialogue does not equate to conjugal dialogue.

FAMILY DIALOGUE (cont'd)

III. E – EXCHANGE. Please do try different methods to see what works best.

- A. It is a good idea to consider not exchanging as a possibility. In this case, each member of the family reads aloud his or her own letter.
- B. Another option is for everyone to pass books to be read silently by each other.
- C. Or everyone may have a choice of reading his/her book or passing it.
- D. One member of the family may read all books.
- E. Non-verbal is a means to develop openness in family dialogue. Exchanging with a kiss may be good.

IV. D - DIALOGUE

- A. There are many ways to do this:
 - 1. The sharing may start spontaneously with anyone starting that wishes to start, and continuing at random, or go around the room.
 - 2. We might decide that everyone has to share. The obvious disadvantage is that there may be someone that just will not share, and what do you do then? How insistent can we be and still be loving, concerned and aware of that person?
 - 3. There may or may not be comments allowed after each person shares. Or it may be better for some families to wait until everyone has finished sharing. But it must be made clear that family dialogue time is a very special time in the family to focus on each other's unique goodness and lovability, and to try to communicate more fully and deeply with one another.
- B. We all have to understand that this special time is not for picking apart each other's letters or comments, or personhoods. Couples should make every effort to explain garbage dumping to the children before they begin a family dialogue at all. A danger is that a child garbage dumps anyway and a parent points it out, not deliberately perhaps, but damage is done to the confidence to share. We can be gentle and comment that we should focus on the good and positive. d. Non-verbal is important in the dialogue, too.
- C. Holding hands and eye contact, facial expressions or body language are all part of the way we communicate.

V. S - SELECT: There are many ways to do this. Discover what is right for your family:

- A. Select the question from the family's activities. (HDIFA us on the picnic?)
- B. Select the question from the family's experiences. (HDIFA us on Christmas?)
- C. Select the question from the family's moods. (HDIFA us as family when we all feel edgy or resentful with each other?)
- D. The question may come out of the last week's dialogue.
- E. The question may come from scripture. We can use the Sunday scripture, or a line or two from it. All members of the family might want a turn at choosing the scripture passage to use, as well as the question.
- F. When we select the question may vary from time to time. We may select right after a family dialogue, or we might wait until we are ready to family dialogue again.
- G. If the question is chosen beforehand, it may be put on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
- H. We should be aware in this section of WEDS and in all the other sections of the diversity that is possible in family dialogue, and the diversity that may occur among the different families that try family dialogue. We are unique as families, too.

FAMILY DIALOGUE (cont'd)

VI. THE 90-DAY GUARANTEE: This is a possibility that families may use. Try family dialogue for 90 days - once a week for 90 days.

Discussion Questions to help couples in their preparation for Family Dialogue:

1. What do I/we want to gain from family dialogue?
2. Do I/we want to change (control, manipulate our children?
3. Is my/our goal deepening family relationships or problem solving?
4. How does family dialogue fit into God's plan for our family?
5. How do I/we apply God's plan to our family?
6. What am I/are we willing to sacrifice for the success of our family dialogues?

Dialogue Questions for Couples. Preparing for Family Dialogue.

1. What are your best qualities as a parent and WAMF?
2. What are my best qualities as a parent and WAMF?
3. What quality as a parent do I most envy in you and WAMF?
4. What is my attitude toward discipline and WAMF?
5. What is my attitude toward punishment and WAMF?
6. Which of our children do I defend most often and WAMF?
7. WAMF when you correct or discipline that child?
8. WAMF when one of our children confides in you alone?
9. Which of our children (at home) (away from home) most needs our help and understanding and WAMF?
10. Which of our children am I the most proud of and WAMF?
11. Which of our children do I feel closest to and WAMF?
12. Which of our children is my favorite and WAMF?
13. Which of our children am I the least proud of and WAMF?
14. In what ways do I feel superior to you as a parent and WAMF?
15. What is my greatest privacy as a parent and WAMF?
16. What do I want most for our children and WAMF?

Note: It is a good idea to take all the questions from your original weekend and dialogue on them in the context of your relationship as parents.

Questions for Family Dialogue

1. What was my most exciting feeling today? DFLD
2. What was the most meaningful experience that I had today? HDIMMF?
3. If Jesus came to our house for a 24 hour visit how would that make me feel?
4. HDIFA being unforgiving?
5. HDIF being unforgiven?
6. HDIFA the love I bring to our family?
7. HDIFA being part of this family?
8. HDIF when someone in our family helps me?
9. HDIF when a friend helps me?
10. HDIF when I receive a compliment from someone in our family?
11. HDIF when I receive a compliment from someone outside our family?
12. What is the meaning of Christmas to me? HDTMMF
13. What is the meaning of Lent to me? HDTMMF

FAMILY DIALOGUE (cont'd)

14. What is the meaning of Easter to me? HDTMMF?
15. What is the meaning of Thanksgiving to me? HDTMMF
16. What is the meaning of my birthday to me? HDTMMF
17. What is the meaning of our anniversary/of Mom and Dad's Anniversary to me? HDTDW
18. WAMFA as a new school year begins?
19. WAMFA attending Church on Sunday?
20. What is my best quality? HDTMMF
21. What do I like best about our family? HDTMMF
22. WAMFA Grandma coming to live with us? (after decision was made) or any decision that had been made in the family.
23. WAMFA the first five years of my life?
24. WAMF when I'm asked to cut back or do without?
25. WAMFA belonging to this family?
26. WAMFA family dialogue?
27. WAMF when Jesus says to us, "Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven?"
28. What are the things I am most thankful for this Thanksgiving? HDTMMF
29. What is the most important thing that has happened to me this week? HDTMMF
30. WAMFA our family as it is right now?
31. WAMFA Christmas this year?
32. What do these words mean to me and WAMF?
33. WAMFA (Child's name) becoming more independent?
34. When do I feel closest to all of you and WAMF?
35. Our goal is family unity. What does it mean to me? How are we doing? HDTMMF
36. What are a few things I like to do with our family WAMF?
37. WAMFA Lent this year?
38. WAMFA us/you (parents) being out 2-3 nights a week?
39. WAMFA the privacy of my room?
40. What do I hope for next summer, how does that affect our family and WAMF?
41. What do I want most out of life and WAMF?
42. What has been my most painful experience in this family this past week and WAMF?
43. What do I like to do best without the family and WAMF?
44. WAMFA Easter this year?
45. WAMFA Springtime in our family?
46. WAMFA sharing our family dialogue?
47. What do you like most about our family? HDTMMF
48. What do you dislike about our family life? HDTMMF
49. How do I feel when our parents show their love for each other in front of us? (husband and wife: How do I feel when we are loving in our children's presence?)
50. How do I feel when we pray together as a family at meal time?
51. How do I feel when we go to church together?
52. How do I feel when we are all having dinner together?
53. What do I think you add most to our family life?
54. What is the possession I have that I like best? HDTMMF?

DIALOGUE SERIES ON SEX

(Do consecutively for maximum value and do in a row.)

1. What are my feelings about my attitude toward sex?
2. What are my feelings about your attitudes toward sex?
3. How do I feel about sex in the morning, sex in the afternoon and sex with the lights on?
4. What are my feelings about my taking the initiative?
5. What are my feelings about you taking the initiative?
6. What are my feelings about my reaction toward sex?
7. What are my feelings about your reaction toward sex?
8. Have I ever felt used or rejected? What are my feelings about that?
9. How do I feel when I know we are to have sex shortly?
10. How do I feel immediately after sex?
11. What words, touches, sounds please me most during sex? What are my feelings about that?
12. What are my feelings when I don't want sex but do anyway?
13. What are my feelings when you don't want sex but do anyway?
14. Is sex pretty much all or nothing? What are my feelings about that?
15. What feelings do I have about sex that I find most difficult to share with you? How does that make me feel?

DIALOGUE SERIES ON DEATH

1. How do I feel about growing old with you?
2. How do I feel about the possibility of our not growing old together?
3. What is my strongest attitude about death? How do I feel about that?
4. What do I fear most about death? How do I feel about my answer?
5. What are the most important things that will end when you die?
6. How do I feel about my answer?
7. How do I feel when we attend a funeral?
8. What are my feelings about Life After Death?
9. How do I feel knowing you might die before me?
10. What are my feelings about the thought of my death?
11. What are my feelings about the thought of your death?
12. What would I do differently than I do now if I knew we had only one year to be together?
How do I feel about that?
13. If death were to separate us tomorrow what one thing would I do today? How do I feel about
my answer?
14. How do I feel about dialoguing on death?
15. I want to go on living with you. What are my feelings about that?
16. If I knew this was our last day together, what would I say to you? What are my feelings
about that?

PRIORITIES OF MARRIAGE

I. Read Story As Is:

We want to tell you a true story about a couple in the book, *YOUR MARRIAGE CAN SURVIVE MID-LIFE CRISES*. They were considered to be the perfect couple, so much in love, so much going for them. After marriage, she dropped out of college, and they both worked full time so they could save money. They only planned on doing this for four years, by then, he would gain experience and he could buy into a firm as a junior partner.

She had a baby 1 1/2 years later, and quit her job. They felt they had plenty of time; they would only have to push their dream back a few years. 2 years later, she had another baby and became totally absorbed in raising two children, homemaking, and being a supportive wife. He was learning the business, and decided he'd rather own his own company anyway. Some day they would have a house... someday there would be enough time and money to do everything they couldn't do now.

After 7 years of marriage, they were still in the apartment, had little cash, and he was not happy with the slow progress of his career, and to make matters worse, she was pregnant again. She wanted the children close in age, and she felt money wasn't important, family was. He wanted to be farther along in his career before increasing their financial and parental responsibilities.

They moved into a three bedroom home and he placed his business plans on hold. He saw his dreams repeatedly being set aside. She seemed totally preoccupied with the children and had little time and energy for him. He kept thinking about the time before marriage when they were so close. He felt life was slipping by; his goals were not being met. He felt like he was being selfish, there was still time ahead, yet... if he were single, he could pursue his own dreams.

The next year he was given the opportunity to be a partner in a new firm, the break they were waiting for! He had more energy and was enjoying life more. Their marriage relationship seemed to improve, with two children in school she had more time for him. The new job did provide more money, but it also demanded more time away from home and more days on the road. He felt that with good progress now, he would have his own company sooner. The next five years were peaceful and fulfilling.

He began to want his own company. They had saved money, but still had to go deeply into debt to start it. She felt like she had to hold everything together, she tried to be understanding... but she sometimes felt as if she were expected to be everything to everyone. She had to go back to work to get the company on its feet. She felt out of place with the new technology and old, next to the younger women.

In many ways, this family was achieving what they wanted, yet without realizing it they were being pulled apart. He was totally preoccupied with his career, their teenager was moving away from the family toward his peer group, and she was overbusy working full time and being a full time homemaker besides. Each were deeply involved in what they felt they needed to do, yet, their-busy preoccupations were moving them into separate worlds, with little or no contact with each other.

PRIORITIES OF MARRIAGE (cont'd)

II. Play Song “Nobody’s Home” from “The Altar” By Ray Boltz.

III. Open Sharing Question: What Feelings Does This Song Evoke In You?

IV. Continue to Read Story

Two years later, even though his company was a success, he wanted more. He felt that he only had a few prime years left, so he poured himself into his work with long hours, extended traveling, and very little emotional reserve for his wife and family. She resented the time spent with his business. With both of them working long hours, they were just too tired for intimacy.

She was glad the children were growing-up, yet...what did the future hold for her? She began to ask herself, “Who am I? What will I become when they're gone? What will be left?” His business was doing well, and her income was no longer necessary, this only made her feel more expendable and unneeded! She decided to return to school and follow her dream of becoming a lawyer. After some conflict, the family finally decided to help her with this dream and help with the housework. She had been confident all her life, sure of herself, her relationship with God, and her love commitment to her husband. Now she was finding herself enjoying the time and attention of a fellow male student, and even looked forward to being with him. She realized how easy it would be for her to have an affair, but she didn't. She craved love, but she wanted it from her husband, but he was preoccupied and exhausted. When she was finally established in her career and was working long hours, they both had come to accept the fact that marital love "cooled off" in the middle years, and were willing to allow their marriage fires to slowly die.

He began to ask himself, I have a big house, I'm successful, respected by people in my town and church, but what's the purpose of it all? I'm too busy with my job to enjoy it! She's too busy with her job, and the kids are all leaving home. What is life all about? I feel empty inside! He found himself reflecting about his earlier life, wishing he's made some changes. Sometimes he wished he's never started the business, it had put them into debt, sent her back to work, and everyone became consumed with surviving. What for? This big hollow house?

He began a friendly relationship with another woman at work... someone to talk with... who understood. He then realized how empty his marriage was, his wife had become a stranger, he'd rather be with this woman, and he began an affair. Confrontation was inevitable and he left. She decided to fight for her marriage and met with the other woman. The other woman decided she did not want to continue the affair and left him.

At a retreat, he spent time reading Scripture and reflecting on the questions he was asking about his life, and he realized he really wanted to remain married. He needed the love and care they had given each other at the beginning of their married life. She went to a counselor to help get their marriage back on track. They decided to work on their marriage relationship.

V. Open Sharing Question: What are some of the ways you keep the spark going in your marriage, other than dialogue? HDMAMMF

PRIORITIES OF MARRIAGE (cont'd)

VI. Continue to Read Story

This couple experienced a growing chasm of separateness, a pattern that is common for most couples. Courtship and early married years include the new and novel, getting to know each other, exploring sex together, launching a new career, raising a family.... then shifts to buying a home and getting the things that mean "we have arrived".

Tragically, a subtle shift takes place, which goes unnoticed until the middle years. The couple increasingly focuses on everyday activities and the accumulation of things, rather than on each other. Suddenly, this couple, who were once so much in love with each other see that they have become boring mid-life people with no common interests except their children, investments, or property. They have fallen into routines that are necessary, but humdrum and lifeless.

VII. Play Song: Let's Begin Again from The Altar by Ray Boltz.

VIII. Dialogue Question: How do I feel about the priority of our marriage in our life? How can we help each other improve it? HDMAMMF.

THE BIRDS IN OUR LIVES

I. Opening Prayer

II. Introduction

Growing up with a teenager in the house and a 12 year old, practicing to be a teenager; challenges us as parents. Moods are ever changing as well as the changes physically. We find ourselves attempting to adapt to the changes -and questioning our parenting skills. Parenthood challenges-a couple, in many ways. Children's wants and needs versus parent responsibilities-and husband, wife needs.

III. Read Poem, "The Legend of The Wingless Birds" by Helen Steiner-Rice

IV. Presentation:

STEVE: As our children go through adolescence, we struggle with our roles as parents. The stress brought on by adolescent children creates feelings we are not-well prepared to handle. We dialogued on: WHAT ARE THESE FEELINGS?

Dear Rita:

I remember the nature programs on TV. The baby birds constantly, even cruelly, badgering the adults for more food. Even those creatures producing such beautiful sights and sounds seemed to have no right to peace or respect from their young.

Sometimes I feel annoyed, just like those badgered adult birds because of our two adolescent daughters. As they struggle to mature, and I remember it being a struggle, I can't help wondering who has the worst of it, them or me.

They reach for independence, but only when it suits them. I get very angry at their constant pushing for more, more clothes, later curfew, cars, more decisions they are not willing to back up with more responsibility.

If the feelings were that simple, they probably could be dealt with readily. But on top of this, I love them, respect them and their sensitivities, envy their qualities and energies, and know they love me. I am proud of what they are and will become. I am proud even of their reflection on me as a parent.

I also know that I am glad they are not shy and compliant, that they are busy, outspoken, social and socially conscious.

These complexities place even more stress on me, make me feel even more badgered. I must constantly juggle these feelings with their feelings and needs. How much easier it would be to be a dictator. I can't even lose my temper without feeling ashamed, as if I have no right to my own feelings if they don't coincide with what they want at the moment.

I identify strongly with the parents on the Cosby show when they, as they often do, long for the day when their children will be gone and their home will no longer have children except as brief visitors. At one time, I did not understand that attitude, but now I do.

I Love You!
Steve

THE BIRDS IN OUR LIVES (cont'd)

RITA: Dear Steve:

I know-our youngest is in full retaliation against me, because I am her mother rather than her peer. When our oldest was at this age the youngest was my little lover. I knew she would never hurt me. Who was I fooling? This is the age where the peer group is more important and it isn't awesome to like your Mother. Now I sit and reflect, "And this too will pass."

When you and I went on a Dove weekend we learned about Deeper Dialogue. We forgot about getting so caught up with the mechanics of whether we were "doing it right" and this helped us share more deeply. When you and I share ourselves more deeply we grow. Just as listening gives us confidence to share lovingly, I have reflected on using this with our children.

As a mother I not only need to make decisions for our children, but I must listen to the spoken and the unspoken words of our-children. I have found I fly off the handle expecting them to make decisions as an adult. While in Sunday School class when we read I Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways";

I realized God spoke to me - saying when children make decisions remember they are children. I expect them to make adult decisions which is impossible. I have often felt very inadequate as a parent. Just as a child stumbles and falls when learning to walk, I must stumble in my role as a parent and spouse. During my periods of blunder, I have felt inadequate and yet learned so much.

On our original weekend we learned; Listening is the Key. Yet I have never learned to fully listen to my children. You and I listen to each other, but I never saw the need of applying it to my relationship as a parent. Yet when I listen to my children, focusing on them with all my attention-I am acknowledging to them they are special, they are worthwhile/important and most of all although it is subtle they are loved. And for an instant two hearts touch and exchange and we grow. When I recognized the concepts of building a marriage relationship can be the same for the parent and child relationship; I have felt reassured and confident as a parent and spouse.

I Love You!

Rita

It isn't-easy letting the reins loose. As we begin parenthood, children rely on us for every need. As they grow, they grow in independence as well. They develop friends and heroes. In Junior High and or the Middle School years, friends become more important than parents in a young person's life. We then dialogued on: What problems between us does this create? HDTMMF?

THE BIRDS IN OUR LIVES (cont'd)

RITA: Dear Steve:

When our oldest daughter was 11-13 years-old she was very rebellious against me in particular. I felt deep hurt-I felt I was constantly in competition with my daughter for your Love and attention. If I acted on a decision she would always try to twist you (her Daddy) to change the decisions. Those were rough years. I felt as though my own daughter was driving a wedge between you and I. I felt manipulated against. When I would express that feeling to you, I felt you really didn't comprehend my deep hurt and loneliness.

When I became upset- I felt the tenseness develop between us. You became upset at my tone and venting and then I felt frustration and anger that you didn't understand why I was upset. I perceived you to down play my feelings of emotions. Then that made me feel unsupported in my role as a parent.

The demands of parenthood on us - leaves very little time for us as a couple to share. I look forward to us examining our energetic lives as parents of teenagers and how in giving to them we still have enough to give to each other so we aren't always getting left-over time. I feel the need for us to taste the dessert more often. I know I would feel calmer endless stress between the two of us.

Love Ya,
Rita.

STEVE: Dear Rita:

The conflicts we and the girls experience are more than just their conflicts with us or with themselves. They often become conflicts between you and I. Maybe they aren't so much conflicts as they are hurt feelings or anxieties created by quick tempers, quick reactions, or loud voices.

I feel pained about impatient reactions. I am quick to lose patience when the "buy me, give me, get me," comes around using the word "only", as in it "only" cost, I "only" need, or I "only" have till, I resent the thick atmosphere of disgusted tones of voices when quick reactions are given and when quick reactions or answers are demanded.

It gets worse when loud voices bring the other to step in to try to mediate or blunt an attack. The intent is to reduce, the tension, but it often serves to increase it between us, because the other perceives they are being second guessed or vetoed.

We know many parents face or will face the adventure of dealing with adolescent children. But between jobs, involvement in or chauffeuring to the kids athletics or other activities, and our own activities and obligations, I feel constantly pressured, constantly required to be somewhere. I feel strongly drawn to being selfish.

Being pressured makes us short with each other, then the feelings of disappointment really sets in and the Maalox comes out.

Love,
Steve

THE BIRDS IN OUR LIVES (cont'd)

V. Dialogue Question: Our goal as parents is to give our children wings! HDTMMF?

VI. Open Sharing Question: Why is it hard to believe our children's actions and attitudes are normal?

SUBMITTED BY
STEVE AND RITA SOWERS
305 SUNBLEST BLVD. SO.
FISHERS, IN. 46038

THE LEGEND OF THE WINGLESS BIRDS

By Helen Steiner Rice

"Oh for the wings of a bird," we cry,
To carry us off to an untroubled sky
Where we can dwell untouched by care
And always be free as a bird in the air.

But there is a legend that's very old,
Not often heard and seldom told,
That once all birds were wingless, too,
unable to soar through the skies of blue.

For, while their plumage was beautifully bright
And their chirping songs were liltingly light.

They, too, were powerless to fly
Until one day when the Lord came by
and laid at the feet of the singing birds
Gossamer wings as He spoke these words:

"Come take these burdens, so heavy now,
But if you bear them you'll learn somehow
That as you wear them they'll grow light
And soon you can lift yourself into flight:

So folding the wings beneath their hearts,
And after endless failures and starts,
They lifted themselves and found with delight
The wings that were heavy had grown so light.

So let us, too, listen to God's wise word,
For we are much like the "wingless birds,"
And if we would shoulder our daily trials
And learn to wear them with sunny smiles.

We'd find they were wings that God had sent
To lift us above our heart's discontent
For the wings that lift us out of despair
Are made by God from the weight of care.

So whenever you cry for "the wings of a bird"
Remember the little legend you've heard
And let God give you a heart that sings
As He turns your burdens to "silver wings."

A WEEKEND OF MUSIC

I. Introduction

JIM: Welcome Everyone - Opening Prayer

CAROL: Jim and I would like to take you on a trip tonight, back in time 14 years ago, to a place so special and dear to us. Our original weekend at Alverna Retreat House in Indianapolis, Indiana.

JIM: For Carol and I, music has always been a way of stirring and expressing emotions, feelings and thoughts. After our Encounter Weekend, we wanted to capture and preserve those very special hours of our lives with music. We auditioned many songs and looked for several weeks to capture the sequence of our feelings as the weekend progressed from Friday night to Sunday afternoon. The words are very special to us. So tonight, just as you gave to each other the gift of your weekend, we would like to give you, in love, our weekend thoughts, feelings, and memories set to music.

CAROL: Please observe the discipline of the weekend. No talking during the tape. We have made a little sketch for you to follow of each piece, why it was chosen, the name and artist of each song. We would also ask that you PLEASE NOT read ahead of each piece, as it might detour your thoughts on what is being played at the moment.

II. Play Songs (attached)

III. Dialogue Question: 10/10: What are my feelings now as I look back and remember our weekend?

IV. Open Sharing Question: What special songs come to mind as you remember your weekend?

Jim & Carol Rhoads
6129 Northwood Dr.
Carmel, IN. 46032

A WEEKEND OF MUSIC (cont'd)

- #1 Neil Diamond: "Play Me"**
The confusion and heartbreak of our past lives only added to the joy of our love when at last we found one another and became one.
- #2 Partridge Family: "I Really Want To Know You"**
I want to look behind the mirror of your eyes and see the secret world, the world your words disguise, the birthplace of your sighs. I want to know the pain of all your silent fears, and learn to speak of them, the one that no one hears. I want to taste your tears. I really want to know you! I want to share the dreams you've never shared before, to stand inside your soul, to unlock every door, and darling, even more!
- #3 Seals & Croft: "We May Never Pass This Way Again"**
We began to see this was an opportunity of a lifetime and we did not want to miss any of it!
- #4 Merrill Osmond: "And You Love Me"**
The words "feelings are neither right nor wrong" gave way to a great release of emotion and we were on our way-----!!
- #5 Joe Weise: "Give Me A Heart of Flesh"**
Our look at what God wished for us in our lives and our marriage was so beautiful, and began to shape a new path for us to follow, especially as we heard him speak to us in the Scripture.
- #6 Soundtrack of Jesus Christ Superstar: "Day by Day"**
This was our heart's desire to turn our lives to Him day by day, from now on.
- #7 Gospel Singers: "Write a Little Letter"**
This song was included with much love and affection for our Priest who led us through the weekend.
- #8 Music from "Impossible Dream: with Jim doing an overlay of the Poem "If We Only Have Love."** These were two pieces that had a tremendous impact on us, and were used most effectively during our weekend.
- #9 Joe Weise: "All I Am"**
Now that our 90-90 was over, this song says what we pledged to each other and to our Lord. Help me put myself into words. My heart in the song I sing.
- #10 Joe Weise: "Communion Song"**
Please bow your heads and close your eyes in prayer with us as we relive that beautiful Communion.
- #11 "The Wedding"**
Let's turn to each other and hold hands. Now please join us and renew our vows.
- #12 John Denver "Annie's Song"**
When John Denver and his wife Annie went on the M.E. Weekend, he was so inspired that after coming off their weekend he wrote this song for her.
As he sings, let us enjoy the love shared by our community of lovers that was the beautiful beginning for us all.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES

JUDY: We would like to start today by asking you a question. How many of you are like your spouse in every way? Raise your hands..... I don't see any hands! Of course, there are lots of ways in which we are different from our spouses. Sometimes these differences are positive forces in our relationship, and sometimes they cause problems. Phil is going to read you a condensed version of a story that shows how one husband was able to deal with some of the differences in his marriage and use them as positive forces. This story is titled, "How Love Came Back". It was written by Tom Anderson and originally appeared in Guideposts in August of 1985.

PHIL: "I made a vow to myself on the drive down to the vacation beach cottage. For two weeks I would try to be a loving husband and father. Totally loving. No ifs, ands or buts. The idea had come to me as I listened to a commentator on my car's tape player. He was quoting a Biblical passage about husbands being thoughtful of their wives. Then he went on to say, "Love is an act of will. A person can choose to love." To myself, I had to admit that I had been a selfish husband - that our love had been dulled by my own insensitivity. In petty ways, really: chiding Evelyn for her tardiness; insisting on the TV channel I wanted to watch; throwing out day-old newspapers that I knew Evelyn still wanted to read. Well, for two weeks all that would I change.

And it did. Right from the moment I kissed Evelyn at the door and said, "That new yellow sweater looks great on you."

"Oh, Tom, you noticed," she said, surprised and pleased. Maybe a little perplexed.

After the long drive, I wanted to sit and read. Evelyn suggested a walk on the beach. I started to refuse, but then I thought, Evelyn's been alone here with the kids all week and now she wants to be alone with me. We walked on the beach while the children flew their kites.

So it went. Two weeks of not calling the Wall Street investment firm where I am a director; a visit to the shell museum, though I usually hate museums (and I enjoyed it); holding my tongue while Evelyn's getting ready made us late for a dinner date. Relaxed and happy, that's how the whole vacation passed. I made a new vow to keep on remembering to choose to love. There was one thing that went wrong with my experiment, however. Evelyn and I still laugh about it today. On the last night at our cottage, preparing for bed, Evelyn stared at me with the saddest expression.

"What's the matter?" I asked her.

"Tom," she said, in a voice filled with distress, "do you know something I don't?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well that checkup I had several weeks ago with our doctor; did he tell you something about me? Tom, you've been so good to me; am I dying?"

It took a moment for it all to sink in. Then I burst out laughing. "No, honey," I said, wrapping her in my arms. "You're not dying; I'm just starting to live!"

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES (cont'd)

JUDY: In this story, Tom tells how he made a conscious effort to choose to be loving toward his wife. He chose to do things that made his wife happy, even though they were not things that he would have chosen to do on his own. He discovered that not only did his choice improve their relationship, but that he even enjoyed some of the activities.

Phil and I want to tell you now one way in which we are very different. Phil is definitely a morning person and I am a night owl. He likes to go to bed early and get up early. If he has a paper to write or a project to finish, he would just as soon go to bed early and get up early to tackle the work. I would rather work into the night until I am finished, then I can rest peacefully, and even sleep in the next morning. We end up both getting about the same amount of sleep - we just don't at different times. But our differences don't end there.

PHIL: I like to wake up to music. I get up and turn on all the lights to help me get going.

JUDY: I like silence and semi-darkness in the morning. I would be happy if I didn't hear a sound for the first hour after I woke up.

PHIL: I like to eat as soon as I get up. I go directly to the refrigerator for my morning orange and fruit.

JUDY: For me, the ideal time for breakfast is about 10:00 A.M.

PHIL: I wake immediately when the alarm rings.

JUDY: Forget the alarm. I don't even want to hear it. I prefer a gentle nudge, after which I turn over for 10 more minutes of snoozing. Then after another nudge, I begin to stretch and slowly stick my foot out from under the covers. After about 5 minutes I manage to get my whole self out of bed.

PHIL: I like to relax by watching T.V.

JUDY: The T.V. drives me crazy. I like to relax by reading a book.

PHIL: Reading a book puts me to sleep. I like to have my tools, papers and books handy so I keep them out on my desk, on shelves, in buckets by the door...

JUDY: I have trouble with clutter. I like to have everything put away, behind closed doors.

PHIL: I like routine.

JUDY: I like variety.

PHIL: I like to be on time, or early when we go somewhere.

JUDY: I like to squeeze every last minute of available time, so I keep puttering around the house until we absolutely have to leave.

PHIL: I am attentive to detail. I like to do things step by step.

JUDY: I tend to just plunge in where ever I happen to be and figure things out from there.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES (cont'd)

PHIL: We could go on forever, but I think you are getting the idea. In fact, there have been times in our relationship when we seemed to have more differences than similarities, and we wondered how we ever got together. In many ways, we are not only different, we are totally opposite.

JUDY: We all know that opposites attract. However, when Phil and I began to dialogue, we discovered that we are surprisingly alike. Yet, our differences still had a way of getting in the way and causing friction in our relationship.

Sometimes the qualities (the differences) that attract us to each other become sources of irritation later. One of the things that I love about Phil is his sense of humor. He has a quick wit, sees humor in lots of situations, often lightens an otherwise somber occasion with his humor. But sometimes it gets tiresome. Maybe it is because I have heard the same pattern of jokes so many times. Sometimes it is because he makes light of a situation when I want to be dead serious. Whatever the reason, I find myself feeling angry, embarrassed, or irritated.

PHIL: While dating, we often think that we have really gotten to know our prospective mate extremely well. After marriage however, we discover many things about each other which we could not be aware of before marriage. These are differences beyond squeezing the toothpaste tube in an opposite manner. I soon discovered how much of a night person Judy really was. I did not know that she liked to read in bed. She enjoyed reading after getting into bed. This was a surprise to be. At times it has been a source of conflict, especially when the next day needed to be an early start. Judy discovered that when I am tired, I am ready for rest. The rest may be a 15 minute cat nap or it may be gone for the evening. Judy goes on and on until a project is completed. Then she will rest. I need to rest along the way.

Both of these differences came to light after we were married. they are among the many differences we continually work to understand and accept to make our marriage function more smoothly-

JUDY: Think about the differences between you and your spouse, differences that affect your relationship. Select one difference that causes friction between you.

Dialogue Question: How does this difference affect our relationship? How do I feel about this?

Open Sharing

DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES (cont'd)

Closing Reading: “AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN” by Wilma Seath Weber

Most of the cities of the seven churches named in the book of Revelation are now piles of rubble. Their walls came tumbling down as a result of earthquakes in Turkey and the relocation of their citizens. Some are completely gone, while others are being dramatically restored. Laodicea is mostly covered by rock and barren earth. Small shards from the ruins beneath may be found, thrown up to the top of the soil during years of tilling by Turkish farmers. Only the very top of the arches of the shopping arcade are visible, and the rough area where the amphitheater once was can just barely be seen.

The crumbled walls of Thyatira lie in a corner within the new city. Children jump and play on them, while visitors try to read the history told by the rubble.

But the walls of Ephesus are going back up. You can walk the marble street that Paul walked and stand in the amphitheater where he spoke so many times. You can wander through the remains of homes as they are being restored, admiring the beautiful tile mosaics that seem to burst out of soil and sand. the library stands tall and impressive, and symbols of Christianity abound in visible as well as hidden areas. The laborious work continues, and perhaps as equal amount of history is yet to be uncovered in the adjoining hillside.

Just like a wall, relationships require constant rebuilding if they are not to end up as ruins. The time and effort expended are well worth the result. God can be our architect, mason, and worker in helping us achieve such a strong and firm wall, filled with loving and caring.

Up With Love, July 13-15, 1990
Phil & Judy Radant - Dealing with Differences.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD

MARIANNE:

My spiritual journey had to begin with my parents influence on me in all of my growing up years. They both demonstrated that rare unconditional love to each one of their five children and to numerous others. At the time I thought all parents were like this and I just took them for granted. We said our prayers each night, and at family meals together. My father often read the Bible and led a discussion of the sermon at Sunday dinners. I can still hear my father's voice read I Corinthians 13: Love is patient and kind, neither jealous nor boastful, etc. How I would love to feel my parents arms around me again.

Even though I had this solid base coming into marriage I didn't have many times that my faith seemed like a personal relationship to God and Jesus Christ. It felt like I'd inherited my beliefs and I was yet to make that leap of personal faith.

My first giant step was when our daughter, Taya, was born. There was no way that there wasn't a Divine Being behind this miracle of life that was a part of us and a little "God Drop". We were both in awe and wonder at God's miraculous creation of a whole and perfect new human being! Jack and I both cried together for the first time when we saw her turn over on her blanket at seven weeks old. When our eyes met we felt very close to each other and to God. This was a new beginning for all of us. I felt fresh and clean like the spring breezes, flowers budding. the earth soaked and plump with expectation. Life held so much Joy and Promise!

There were many other steps along the path in my faith journey - some happy events and some very sad, but each with the thread of knowledge that God was there helping me along.

When Jack and I went on our Marriage Encounter Weekend my expectations were just to have a weekend together that might make us a little more understanding of one another. Little did I realize that God was ready for me to take another Giant Step of faith and growth as an individual child of God and as part of a couple that was on this spiritual journey together, forever.

I truly felt loved unconditionally again on that weekend and came to experience the verse "Love One Another As I Have Loved You". I had never known that such love that we shared was possible! The love I felt was like the Grand Canyon and the Grand Tetons at the same moment in time. I felt at one with the universe for a few moments and as I wrote my 90/90 my joy and thankfulness overwhelmed me. I found myself writing words I had never expressed, and had even thought were trite, when others used such terms like "Hallelujah" or "Praise God". I was praying when Jack came into the room and had just written "I am a new creation. And then we fell into each other's arms with a love and joy we had never felt before in our lives!

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD (cont'd)

JACK:

My spiritual life had been on hold from the time I graduated from college to the time we went on our original Marriage Encounter Weekend. Although we attended Church and Sunday School classes regularly, I was not growing in any new directions. our original weekend was a tremendous experience and was the high point of our married life. It was not a spiritual experience for me; however, this original weekend was about to set in motion a chain of events that would profoundly reshape my spiritual journey.

One year later we were at a Marriage Encounter Community Weekend. There were eleven couples and the sharing was very deep. Up until then I had been very suspicious of born-again Christians. They always asked me if I were saved and what was the date. When I couldn't produce a date they made me feel unworthy. I felt isolated like being an outcast in your own family. on this weekend a woman shared about her born-again experience and when she gave the good news to her pastor, instead of rejoicing, he told her to keep it quiet so as not to disturb the congregation. She felt so hurt and isolated from the church she had grown up in. My heart went out to her and suddenly I had a new feeling about born-again Christians. It was like finally getting to know someone you had been around all your life and now seeing them in a new light.

Most important on the weekend, I felt the presence of God for the first time in my life. Several times when we were sharing together, I just knew God was with us and I was strangely warmed. One time when I was writing I had the feeling I was just observing and God was guiding the pen, Since that time we have had several experiences where we were sharing and suddenly we were observers and God was forming the words for us. We have also had a number of experiences where we felt God is present with US. Feeling Gods presence for the first time is a little like the first time you fall in love. You don't expect it and the feeling is exhilaration.

MARIANNE:

That first year we had many peaks and valleys like a roller coaster. We wrote a talk for a renewal entitled "The Agony and the Ecstasy", and that is just what it was for us.

One month after our Marriage Encounter Weekend I took a wonderful, once in a lifetime, 10-day trip with my mother to Nova Scotia. That time with my mother was the most special and sharing time we had ever had together. In one more month, my mother died peacefully of a heart attack in her own home on the family davenport with her own hand crocheted afghan as a cover. The loss was immeasurable and yet, there was God. As my brothers and sisters sorted through my mother's valued possessions of a life time we cried one moment and laughed the next at all the beautiful memories we shared of Mother and Dad. There was absolutely no quarreling or arguing over who got what. My older brother had worked out a well-organized plan and where there had been differences in the past they melted, where there was jealousy, it was replaced with kindness (I Corinthians, 13), It seemed for a time that I Corinthians, 13 - The Love Passage - was coming alive for all of us.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD (cont'd)

MARIANNE (cont'd):

During this time I had the feeling that both of my, parents were still watching over us with God and they were proud of us. We were finally behaving like the children they had set the example for and as close to that ideal of Agape Love that my, Dad had read to us numerous times from the Bible. That kind of Love is only possible with God's presence.

After my mother died I could picture Heaven for the first time. My Dad had died eight years earlier, and I had the undeniable realization that they were together now and were with God, watching over us, and enjoying God's perspective at last.

Our Marriage Encounter Weekend had given me excellent preparation for this tragedy in my life. Jack and I were very close and he was very comforting to me with his new found expression and understanding of feelings.

I had shared my Marriage Encounter experience with my mother on our trip and I could imagine my Mother and Dad having a kind of Marriage Encounter in Heaven. I have a much better sense of God's wholeness now and often pray to Mother and Father God. I have a personal relationship with God now.

JACK:

Our spiritual journey took a major turn when our daughter suddenly became mentally ill in January of 1982 in the middle of her senior year of high school. She had been an honor student and very mature and responsible. She was in the hospital most of the next 2-1/2 months. For the first time, life was out of control. There was nothing I could do to help Taya and it appeared we might go bankrupt with growing medical bills and there was nothing I could do to stop that. Thus, I, for the first time had to make a leap of faith and trust the Lord that all would be well in the long run. It is a little like being on top of a burning building and being asked to jump into the firemen's net far below.

During her manic depression episodes, we became fervent believers in the power of prayer. During her first manic experience Taya got completely out of control and had to be placed in restraints for a whole day. She had become so dehydrated she had to go to emergency for treatment. During this time she also had a seizure and when we first saw her on a Sunday night she looked like a zombie just like the characters in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest". All weekend we had the prayer chains busy both locally and nationally. Sunday night a call came in from Nashville that someone had received the message from the Lord that Taya would be restored. The next day I received a telephone call from Taya who said "I'm fine, Dad". She sounded so natural. The doctors and nurses commented that she had made a "remarkable recovery and we knew why.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD (cont'd)

JACK (cont'd):

Four years ago, Taya was extremely depressed and then just ran away. We called the police and the prayer chain and started looking for her. Several hours later we received a telephone call that the police had found her and an ambulance had taken her to the hospital. We arrived and so did a contingent of members from our Church. We all sat in waiting and prayer as Taya lay barely breathing in the Intensive Care Unit. We found out later that Taya had swallowed sixty tranquilizers and washed them down with vodka and lay down to die in a field of tall grass. Several hours later something made her get up and stagger around. A young man across the street saw her and called the police. Two days later when we arrived to visit her at the mental hospital she was talking and laughing on the telephone to a friend like a normal teenager. Another miracle and another example of the power of prayer. And a prayer is answered in this fashion, it feels like you have just won the game and you want to yell "Praise the Lord" from the highest mountain top!

Finally, through Taya's illness we have become very aware of Christian healing. A friend of ours referred us to a Christian healer and the three of us went to see her a number of times. While Taya was not helped much, we were greatly. She even sat with us in a meeting with the psychiatrist and the Day treatment staff. We read several books and listened to some tapes on Christian healing by the Sandfords and others. We listened to testimonies of healing of a couple's daughter who was terminally ill with leukemia and another couple who had an alcoholic son healed and a number of other testimonies. Until Taya's illness we have never given Christian healing any thought other than stories in the Bible. But now we were powered with a new awareness. It felt like taking a course and uncovering a number of new revelations. Our horizons were lifted.

MARIANNE:

Another step I was forced to make in my faith was when our daughter, Taya, quite suddenly became suicidal at the age of 18. When this first happened, I was cut to the very core with shock, grief, sadness and confusion. I spent many, hours talking with her, crying with her, and hugging her. This was my first realization I had of what it meant when Jesus said, "No greater love has any man than that he lay down his life for another". I knew that at that point if I could do absolutely anything, including dying, for my daughter that she might become well and happy again, then I would do it.

This wound is still cutting to me as we have struggled over eight years with her manic/depressive illness and ten hospitalizations. During these lowest times, God has always sent a sign of encouragement. One time when Taya was hospitalized and in restraints we went to visit and were not allowed to see her. We went out to the car - I was in tears, feeling very alone and discouraged. I felt completely empty inside as if I had been scraped cruelly from the inside out. When I reached the car there on the floor was a red cardboard heart I had never seen before and it wasn't near Valentine's Day, but God knew I loved hearts. I still carry that red heart as a reminder of God's presence and encouragement in my life.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD (cont'd)

MARIANNE (cont'd):

Another time during a crisis in Taya's life and after a Marriage Encounter Convention, I received a vision in a dream of a promise from God that someday our Taya will be completely healthy and happy. The symbol for her was a beautiful clear, blue, crystal lake - the same color as her beautiful blue eyes! I was told through the dream that we might have to travel many different roads and ask for directions from many different people along the way but the "Lake" was in sight from the high hill in my dream, and Taya's complete healing be a reality - that is God's Promise! Thank you God!!! You are an awesome God!

This past year has been the hardest since that first onslaught of illness. I came to understand what "Pray Without Ceasing" is. Prayer has been my mainstay. When I haven't even had the energy to pray I have repeated, "The Lord bless Taya and keep Taya. Lord make Your face to shine upon her and be gracious unto her. Lord lift up your countenance upon Taya and give her Your peace. Amen."

JACK:

Much of our spiritual growth in the last ten years has been a result of the people we knew and shared with in that time period. Several years ago a close couple shared with us that he was gay. I had not known anyone before who professed to be homosexual so it was like entering a whole new world. It is one thing to have views about homosexuality in the abstract but it is quite something else to know someone in the reality. As a result of his "coming out" we have read a number of books on the subject and attended several gay and lesbian worship services in which we experienced the presence of God. We have gained a whole new perspective on the subject.

In the last few years we have had two close couple friends who had been married for 28 years, get divorced. One was Marianne's brother and the other was my roommate from college who I have remained close friends with since college as he has served in the Methodist ministry. Both divorces hit us hard and we have struggled to remain friends with all parties. Marianne's brother has remarried and is in Florida working on a low-income housing project. He is very, happy. His former wife is in her third year at Garrett Seminary and will enter the ministry next year in Michigan. My friend was suspended from the ministry and is now serving out his punishment. He has a part-time job with the elderly and hopes to get back to the ministry soon. He is very happily remarried. His former wife is living in our area and is involved in leadership positions and activities she would not have thought about before.

This is a real paradox for us. We have seen all of them who were very dear to us go through a lot of pain but somehow they seem better off because of the divorce. We have quite a different perspective on divorce at this time. The feelings are bewilderment, pain, amazement, sensitivity, caring, new understanding, and openness.

Our Church has also been a source of our spiritual growth in recent years. Our Sunday School Class has been very close and very supportive to us during our ups and downs with our daughter and our ups and downs in our spiritual life. The class has allowed us to grapple with our spiritual beliefs. We have been very open with each other, willing to listen to each other, and willing to consider other options.

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD (cont'd)

JACK (cont'd):

Several years ago our senior pastor died of cancer and this event brought our Church together in a manner I had never witnessed. In the Sunday service after his death there was more sharing in that service than I can ever remember. It was a very moving time for everyone.

Our new senior pastor has been a tower of strength to the Church as well as to us. There is a new spirit of vitality as we have moved into a new Church which is double the size of our old Church. One of the programs she instituted was a book discussion group. As a result, we started reading more books and we started reading books out loud to each other.

This has been great for our relationship as we read at night and in the car on trips. it has added a new dimension to our marriage. Last year we were reading "Joshua and the Children" and came to the part where the Jesus in Ireland was arising from the dead when we looked out the car and there were three empty crosses on the side of the road. Wow! What a spiritual happening we shared.

Also last year on our way from Florida we read "Kaffir Boy" by, Mark Mathabane. We became so excited and moved by the book we recommended the author to the Harper staff in charge of cultural events. As a result, he was brought in as a speaker and we had a chance to talk with him over dinner before the lecture and I had the chance to introduce him.

Recently we just finished a book "This Present Darkness". The predominance of demonic forces brought back memories of other books we have read on the subject and our experiences with our daughter, Taya. In summary our spiritual journey has led us to many spiritual happenings, to many new perspectives on our faith, to many supporting relationships and to many new challenges.

MARIANNE:

Recently on our Walk to Emmaus, during a time of worship and meditating Jesus told me, "Remember my promise" and "I will always be with you". I realize God is my sustainer. May God grant all of us his peace and joy that passes all human understanding. Isn't our God an awesome God? Amen.

Play Music: "Our God is an Awesome God"

Dialogue Question: Describe in loving detail the beginning of your spiritual journey.
HDTMMF?

Open Sharing Question: What event in your life has led to Spiritual Growth or How have you experienced God?

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

KATHY:

Today we plan to share with each other our thoughts and feelings on the topic of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. What is it? Who has it? Do we?

Unconditional as defined in the dictionary means without condition or reservations, absolute. Therefore it follows that unconditional love must be love that has no conditions or reservations attached – just absolute love — love no matter what.

As Dean and I began thinking about this topic we went back to our roots - our childhoods. Both of us had relatively happy lives as children. We felt secure in our families. We never worried about being given away or traded in when we misbehaved although we knew that there might be trouble, or as my father said, "Feathers will fly!" when we were found out.

Why did I feel safe, loved and protected? Why did Dean? What was it that our parents did or had that made us know that no matter what we could depend on them? I think it was love. Love without reservation. Love - no matter what.

DEAN:

As a child I always knew my parents loved me because of the way they took care of me. They were always there to be with me, encourage me and yes, even give me a swift kick on the back side when I needed it. As a little boy I can remember being scared to go to school as I started first grade. I had heard the teacher was mean and I wasn't about to put up with a mean teacher. I remember my mom walking all the way to school with me and quietly waiting outside until I felt comfortable in class. She cared enough about me to go that extra mile, literally. I also remember the times my dad would play catch with me. I loved baseball and he knew it was a special treat for him and I to have that time to throw the ball back and forth.

I never realized until I had kids of my own how difficult it must have been to find the time to do the little things that last a life time for a child. I still think how great it would be to play catch with dad again or have the opportunity to share a walk with my mom who passed away ten years ago.

I try very hard to remember and put into practice that special gift of doing those little things for my kids that they will always remember. The kiss, the hug, the walk, the ride, the words of praise or simply being there when they need me.

You are going to have an opportunity to share with the whole group. As you share hold your spouse's hand and look into their eyes. Remember that whatever you choose to share will remain in this room. This is not a time to judge or make comments about another person's sharing. Raise your hand if you wish to share on the following question.

Sharing Question: How do you know your parents loved you?

KATHY:

Maybe parents have this "unconditional love" for their children. I know I have a love that won't quit for my two children. There were times when they were little that I felt exasperated with them because of their non-stop wiggling, their shows of stubbornness, and their just plain (at times) disobedience.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE (cont'd)

KATHY (cont'd):

I felt like throwing up my hands and quitting, leaving home, or locking them up. This feeling never lasted long. As soon as they were quietly playing, or better yet sleeping, I would look at them and think "What miracles" and my heart would swell with a love that brought tears to my eyes, I loved them so much! Their mischievous activities and the frustrating moments were forgotten never to be brought up again.

Our little children are now kids who think they know more than their parents. They have grown and changed in many ways. They have habits that drive me crazy. They are sloppy room keepers. They don't always remove their muddy shoes before tracking through the house, and they say, "OOOOh Mom" when I tell them for the fifth time to take a bath. These are just a few of the things they do that really irritate me. But you know I still look at them and see the children that I love. Their irritating habits are pushed aside and replaced by that special love, perhaps unconditional love.

DEAN: READ: Love You Forever by Robert Munsch (attached)

KATHY:

Isn't it neat how parents can live through raising their children and continue loving them through all those changes. Children are continually growing and changing. We know that, and expect it. I wonder if more of our marriages would survive if we had the unconditional love for our spouse that a parent has for their child along with the expectation that our spouse will continue to grow and change as an individual.

I love Dean, but I don't always overlook the things he does that bother me and think "Now isn't that cute" or "He'll grow out of it." I often sulk or pick at him without approaching him about how I don't like this new thing he's doing. I get mad at him. I begin to wonder if I love him. I need to communicate with him when something he does really bothers me. This is when I need to remember that my love for Dean is unconditional on two levels, the accepting you for who you are level, and the I can try and change a little for you level.

On our M.E. weekend I learned that the three basic ways I react to my husband are rejection, tolerance and acceptance. Sometimes after Dean has shared his feelings on a frustrating day at work, I will mention that I wouldn't have gotten angry over such a little thing, or that maybe he needs to look at why he feels angry. When I do this I have rejected his feelings, making him feel hurt and isolated. As Dean told me of his distress over having to let a hard working employee go, I listened with my ears and understood what he was saying, but I didn't really focus on my husband and his sincere regret and quiet suffering in this situation. I tolerated Dean and listened to his sharing, but I didn't let myself get emotionally involved in his problem. Toleration is the level at which most communication is done. I strive to reach the level of acceptance in the way I react to what Dean shares with me. At this level I need to focus on who Dean really is, I need to forget about analyzing his actions and feelings and just love who he is right at that moment. Dialogue helps me attain this level of communication because it narrows my focus to Dean and his feelings. It forces me to take the uninterrupted time to really see Dean for who he is and offers me the chance to love him as he is, without question.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE (cont'd)

DEAN:

We are going to share with you parts of love letters we wrote that begin with qualities we admire most about each other and end with an area in which we feel uncomfortable about our spouse,

Kathy, I love your blue eyes. The way they smile at me and of course the way they always read my mind and know more about me than anyone else, I also love the Christian way you view other people. I will sometimes judge and criticize others only to find out you aren't saying anything. You are trying to show me a good example by not joining in on my critical evaluation. I appreciate your beautiful sense of humor. I need to learn to laugh at myself, to become more humble, even if it hurts. You really guide me in this quest.

When I get home after a tough day at work you often start asking me lots of questions without giving me any time to relax and unwind. I feel irritated that you don't recognize my need for quiet time. I feel like a speeder who gets stopped and would like to tell the policeman off but can't. I know you are only trying to show interest in my work life. I try to keep this problem in perspective, but it continues to annoy me. I need you to give me some time to acclimate myself to the family before we discuss my day at work... I LOVE YOU.

KATHY:

Dear Dean, I am grateful for the many times you have come to my rescue when I have gotten myself into more than I can handle. You calm me down and help me find a path that leads me through my dilemma. You even lend a hand when you can. Your cheerful optimistic attitude has inspired me to keep on. Remember when my mother was in the nursing home and I was feeling guilty? You supported me in having her come to live with us even though you knew it would affect your home life too. You helped me when I was overloaded and never said, "I told you so." I love you for all this.

Dean, it's this same optimistic cheerful attitude of yours that has left me feeling isolated at times. When I was in the depths of despair and worry over my mother's health and tried to communicate this with you I felt rejected because of your reaction to my exposed feelings. You treated me like a little child saying that everything would be okay and that I shouldn't worry. Even though you didn't realize it you were more or less telling me I was silly for feeling the way I did. I felt alone in my despair and was afraid to share it with you most of the time. I need you to help me and support me in what I do, but I also need you to respect and accept the way I feel, even when those feelings make no sense to you. I'll love you forever.

DIALOGUE QUESTION: write a love letter sharing a personal experience of practicing unconditional love. HDTMMF?

OPEN SHARING:

Love You Forever

by Robert Munsch

A mother held her new baby and very slowly rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she held him, she sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

The baby grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was two years old, and he ran all around the house. He pulled all the books off the shelves. He pulled all the food out of the refrigerator and he took his mother's watch and flushed it down the toilet. Sometimes his mother would say, "this kid is driving me CRAZY!"

But at night time, when that two-year-old was quiet, she opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor, looked up over the side of his bed; and if he was really asleep she picked him up and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him she sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

The little boy grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was nine years old. And he never wanted to come in for dinner, he never wanted to take a bath, and when grandma visited he always said bad words. Sometimes his mother wanted to sell him to the zoo!

But at night time, when he was asleep, the mother quietly opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep, she picked up that nine-year-old boy and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she rocked him she sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

The boy grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was a teenager. He had strange friends and he wore strange clothes and he listened to strange music. Sometimes the mother felt like she was in a zoo!

But at night time, when that teenager was asleep, the mother opened the door to his room, crawled across the floor and looked up over the side of the bed. If he was really asleep she picked up that great big boy and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. While she rocked him she sang:

Love You Forever (cont'd)

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

That teenager grew. He grew and he grew and he grew. He grew until he was a grown-up man. He left home and got a house across town. But sometimes on dark nights the mother got into her car and drove across town. If all the lights in her son's house were out, she opened his bedroom window, crawled across the floor, and looked up over the side of his bed. If that great big man was really asleep she picked him up and rocked him back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while she rocked him she sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

Well, that mother, she got older. She got older and older and older. One day she called up her son and said, "You'd better come see me because I'm very old and sick." So her son came to see her. When he came in the door she tried to sing the song. She sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always...

But she couldn't finish because she was too old and sick. The son went to his mother. He picked her up and rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And he sang this song:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my Mommy you'll be.

When the son came home that night, he stood for a long time at the top of the stairs. Then he went into the room where his very new baby daughter was sleeping. He picked her up in his arms and very slowly rocked her back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And while he rocked her he sang:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
As long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

RESPECT

CHUCK:

Aretha Franklin once sang “R E S P E C T, find out what it means to me.” Well, according to the dictionary it means to feel or show esteem for, to honor. A feeling of deferential regard. To show consideration for, or avoid violation of.

Respect is one of those strange kinds of things that you have to give away in order to acquire. Claiming "I don't get no respect" has produced a nice living for Rodney Dangerfield even though the statement is of course, pure theatrical fiction. He gets plenty of respect with every performance in the form of applause money and fame.

Respect has many facets. We say that we respect God, our country, the law, our elders, our neighbors, other person's property. We respect the environment, other people's rights, customs, and religious differences. Respect is also closely linked to some, other words such as love, admiration, and, strangely enough, fear.

As a couple we respect the homes ours and others, each other's privacy, differences, ideas and personal boundaries. We realize that respect is something that is received in return for being freely given.

DALICE:

Building the foundation.

Like all of you, my life has been shaped by the people from whom I have received the most affirmation and approval. Living in a home where strong authority was the basis of the day to day living, I was influenced by my parents' very strong rule. My Dad and Mom demonstrated authority over each area of our home life. Mom was in charge of the running the household and was the main decision maker. Dad made the money and shared in the discipline. Mom and Dad showed respect for each other and they had an equal part in the making all the major decisions involving the family. My grandparents' home was organized in the same manner.

My family was deeply involved in the Masonic Order. One of the Mason's main goals along with charity work is raising young men with ideals to enhance manhood. They focus on education, developing the work ethic, patriotism, commitment towards family, faith and the respect and protection of womanhood. As children, we attended many events with the Masons and Eastern Star. During those formative years, these activities made a lasting impression on me. I learned how things should be for men and women.

I was raised in the Methodist Church and that is where I witnessed the strongest messages concerning respect. The Bible teachings, the Sunday school lessons, the way women and men in the church treated each other all demonstrated to me, "this is how it should be done." Women's opinions were respected and they were held in high esteem.

RESPECT (cont'd)

CHUCK:

Respect, like most everything else is learned in childhood from parents, teachers and peers. My parents, while not overly authoritarian, nevertheless had certain standards by which they lived and demanded that we (my two brothers, a sister and I) also adhere. They were not church goers but did raise us in the Judeo-Christian tradition of hard work, honesty, good citizenship and respect for persons and property.

My parents were children of the depression. My Dad quit school after the tenth grade in order to earn money for the family. He did everything from shoveling coal to the CCC's, the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Civilian, Conservation Corps was a quasi-military organization formed as part of Roosevelt's New Deal which provided food, shelter and a small wage in return for labor on various forest conservation projects.

Despite his lack of formal education my Dad worked his way up from a machine operator to plant engineer over the course of his career. He did all of his own maintenance work around the house and on the car. I guess that's where I learned to do the same.

Around our house, we had a set routine. Dad got off work at 3:30, would be home by 3:45, take the newspaper and retreat into the-bathroom. Around our house there were two things we kids did not do:

- A. Be in the bathroom at 3:45 and
- B. Mess up the newspaper before Dad read it.

From this upbringing I learned that a certain amount of respect can be earned by working hard, being honest, sticking to your promises, paying your debts and minding your own business. My parents expected that we would treat them with respect which means that we pretty much did what we were told to do it and kept a tight rein on our tongues.

In school, I loosened the reins, however, and that plunged me into a world of trouble. It seems that some of the things I said, which I considered to be finely tuned satire, were mistaken for sarcasm. My Junior High years were not the happiest until I learned to choose my audiences more carefully. In short I learned that you could feign respect and as a teenager one is well advised to do so. Most especially around those persons who have the power to make your life miserable.

DALICE:

When I was plunged into the world of doctors and nurses in the middle 60's, the scenario was very different from the way I was raised. Nurses were still getting up so doctors could sit down. I overheard many negative sexist remarks about women and their annoying female problems. These experiences caused feeling of resentment and frustration but I was not in a position to change any of their long standing attitudes and behaviors as a new, wet behind the ears, graduate nurse.

Respect, from my perspective, is an attitude about your fellow man that must be carried consistently in all aspects of daily living. Our spouses, children, parents, other family members, neighbors, friends and co-workers must be included in this list. John Congley, a writer in the April 90 edition of Guideposts.. Magazine state's that "Tolerance implies a respect for another person, not because he, is, wrong or even because he is right, but because he is human."

RESPECT (cont'd)

DALICE:

In my professional life as a nurse, I depend on all of my co-workers to function as a team. Our goal is to provide the highest quality of care to each individual patient and family. In order to attain this goal, I concentrate on the role of each member of the health care team that affect the outcome of the patient's care, Nurses, nurses' aides, kitchen staff, housekeeping staff, and maintenance people just to mention a few. It is my responsibility to make sure each person, no matter what title they have or job they perform, knows that they are valued and respected in their roles. They know they are needed and appreciated. When appropriate, their opinions are sought and their ideas are used to enhance the positive outcome of the patient's hospital stay. As the team leader, I focus on building an atmosphere of respect and caring among the staff. The rewards are outstanding! Over the years, as I have matured, I have made a conscious effort to incorporate this philosophy, in all aspects of my life.

"The most important phase of living with a person is the respect for that person as an individual." This was stated by Millicent Carey McIntosh in the April 90 issue of Guideposts Magazine.

Now we come to the part that is really tricky. Working and cooperating with co-workers may be easy for some people, but developing that same relationship with a spouse is another ball game. Many women and men go into marriage convinced of the idea that they can change their spouse to their way of life and thinking. "When we marry, he/she will stop drinking, taking drugs, cheating, beating on me, start to go to church, etc." But in reality, that just does not happen.

When Chuck and I were married we had come to our marriage as two completely different independent people. We had been on our own and making our own decisions for a long time. As it turned out, we were fortunate because we had the chance to literally get to know each other with little distraction from our family and friends. We started from scratch, working on maintaining our individual identities but melting into that feeling of oneness that is so unique and special in a marriage relationship. We found we had to "die" to our own selfish ways; the "I and Me first syndrome". We began to think of our relationship as "WE", united by God during our marriage vows. Our mutual respect for each other eased the way to accomplish this goal.

CHUCK:

Dalice and I are really quite fortunate that things have worked out so well since we really did not know each other that well before we got married. When we met I was a sailor stationed in Bermuda and she was a new nurse on her first vacation with some girlfriends. We met at a beach party. She really had not wanted to go to the party, but her friends talked her into it. "I knew that she was not happy about the situation but she stuck it out and kept my mind occupied by talking non-stop. I did get her address, however, and a couple of months later we began writing each other.

Later I was reassigned to a ship homeported in Boston and was able to get down to New York to see her four or five weekends during the winter and spring of 66/67. We became engaged before my Vietnam cruise in 1967 and were married in April of 69 after I had gotten out of the service. Total clock time we actually spent together before marriage I would estimate to be about three to four weeks. Her parents did not like me and were dead set against the engagement. Dalice's twin sister was already married and here I was trying to take away their last little girl. They said that it wouldn't work, she was outgoing and gregarious; I was introverted, quiet and introspective.

RESPECT (cont'd)

CHUCK:

I, however, prefer to think of myself as "laid back", sounds better than introverted, doesn't it? Well, fortunately her parents were wrong and over the years, their attitude toward me has changed. I think that the three terrific grandchildren we've given them may have softened them up.

As we moved into marriage it was, at first, like an extension of courtship. We ate out often and well, went to all of the new movies and took little weekend vacation trips whenever we wanted to. Since we were both working full time, money was not a problem. It was almost an extension of our single lives except that now we both lived at the same address.

Our lean years occurred shortly after that, however when we decided to buy a house and have a child. Well, we bought a house all right but the child turned out to be twin boys. As you can imagine, our lives changed real fast and a whole lot. I look back at this time, 1970, as a watershed year for us as a couple. This was the time when my love for Dalice matured from what might better be called infatuation to real love and respect, the kind described in First Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verses 4 through 7:

Love is patient, [love is kind]. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always, trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

So that we may more fully understand what love and respect are perhaps we should, by way of bad example, show what they are not. So here we present "The Bickersons", as played by Francis Langford and Don Ameche. This episode is called "The Wedding Anniversary".

<https://archive.org/details/TheBickersons54Episodes>

Well, aren't they charming? Of course, none of us actually know a couple like that ... do we?

DALICE:

Masks

I have been a "Friendly Helper" all of my life and have used this mask to gain acceptance and to cope with day to day living. This has presented a challenge to Chuck, the consummate "Logical Thinker". Not until our marriage Encounter Weekend twelve years ago, did we begin to understand what really made each other tick. Subsequently through dialog and exposure to other M.E. couples in the community and church, we started to evolve into a new awareness of each other as unique and special individuals. Our underlying respect for each other played a big part in developing our deepening love for each other. Our goal is to maintain our own identity while also growing in our oneness as a couple, ordained and blessed by our Heavenly Father.

RESPECT (cont'd)

CHUCK:

I didn't know about masks either until our weekend but I did understand about such things as self-worth and coping. I had always considered myself to be logical and have always admired others who could put some of the pieces of life together objectively and come up with right answers.

So when the description of the mask of the logical thinker was read, I knew instantly that they were describing me, I have always believed that it is very important to be correct, to be right, I also like to compartmentalize my life and do not like to reveal too much of myself. Feelings, after all, can become potent weapons in unfriendly hands.

Our understanding of our own and each other's masks has led us to new insights and respect for each other. It has also led both of us to change ever so slightly and for the better, I think. Occasionally we joke that I am becoming a logical helper and she a friendly thinker, As a couple, the old adage is true, we are truly greater than the sum of our parts,

DALICE:

Read: "Be Kind To One Another" (attached)

CHUCK:

Some "Signs of Disrespect" include:

1. Name calling and behind the back talk like "the old lady" or "the old ball and chain".
2. Snide remarks about the spouse or spouses family and friends.
3. Belittling the spouses occupation. "She's just a housewife" or "He's only a clerk".
4. Blame placing and refusing to accept responsibility.
5. Taking your spouse (or anyone) for granted. Failing to say thank you for small kindnesses, not praising , or hugging or kissing enough.

And Now We Have a Question for you.

Dialogue Question: How has respect played a role in the growth of our marriage relationship? In our Family relationship? HDMAMMF?

RESPECT (cont'd)

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

(Ephesians 4:32)

Today I want to remind myself that:

People bruise easily.

They are hurt easily.

They are sensitive.

They have their moments of discouragement.

They sometimes lose faith.

They have feelings of helplessness and inadequacy.

How do I know people are like that?

Why, because I am like that too!

So I pray not to be a source of irritation to anyone.

I pray not to be a burden to anyone.

I pray not to cause anyone grief.

I pray not to make anyone unhappy.

Father God, I know that the object and aim of all existence is spiritual growth and unfoldment.

And I know too from practical experience that meeting challenges and solving problems accelerates growth and unfoldment.

So probably each of Your children has all the challenges and all the problems he can handle.

Let me not add to his burden.

Let me withhold criticism.

Let me ease another's way, when I can.

Let me be a peacemaker.

Let me be a light bringer.

Let me see through eyes of love.

Let me see the Christ Spirit in another person to lift him, to bless him, to guide him, to satisfy his every need.

A MARRIAGE PRAYER

Bless our marriage, oh God, as we begin our journey down the road of life together. We don't know what lies ahead for the road turns and bends. But help us to make the best of whatever comes our way.

Help us to hug each other often... laugh a lot, talk more, and argue less.

Help us to continue to enjoy each other as we did when we first met.

Help us to realize that nothing nor no one is perfect and to look for the good in all things and all people including ourselves.

Help us to respect each other's likes and dislikes, opinions and beliefs, hopes and dreams and fears even though we may not always understand them.

Help us to learn from each other and to help each other to grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Help us to realize that there is design and purpose in our lives as in the world and no matter what happens to us we will hold on to each other and know that things have a way of working out for the good.

Help us to create for our children a peaceful, stable home of love as a foundation on which they can build their lives.

But most of all, dear God, help us to keep lit the torch of love that we now share in our hearts so that by our loving example we pass on the light of love to our children and to their children and to their children's children forever. Amen.

-Bud Henry Bowen

RESPECTFULLY DISAGREEING

There is nothing like a good argument to clear the air. But whether the fight is between friends, spouses, or parents and children experts say there are rules to keep the proceedings respectful and create opportunities for greater honesty and understanding.

- ❖ Stick to a single issue and avoid past grievances. If you're bickering about the family deficit, don't dredge up distracting complaints about in-laws or vacation plans.
- ❖ No name calling. It will only make the argument vindictive.
- ❖ Be honest. Say what's on your mind and get the fight over with.
- ❖ Listen. Let the other person have his say. Then have yours.
- ❖ Don't nag or battle in public. Respect others and yourselves.
- ❖ Never hit. Nothing justifies violence.
- ❖ Don't threaten to end the relationship. It's usually unrealistic.
- ❖ Don't walk out in the middle of a fight. Nothing is solved.
- ❖ Apologize when wrong.
- ❖ Compromise. Show respect for the other person's feelings by meeting halfway. You won't get very far trying to change people.
- ❖ Don't hold a grudge. Learn to live with whatever resolution you both agree to. As the Bible says, don't let the sun set on your anger,

Disagreeing with people we care about is part of life. The key to an honorable and productive argument is respecting the other person.

BALANCING GOALS

Our presentation has to do with goals in a marriage. The origin of the presentation came from an article "What are your goals in marriage?" out of the January 1989 issue of Marriage & Family magazine published by Abbey Press. The author of the section called Marriage Matters is David Mace.

He states: "As human beings, we have the privilege of spending- a number of years-seventy as an average-in this wonderful world and as members of human society. Out of all the millions of humankind, you two have chosen each other and have made a commitment to share a large part of the human life span together."

Take a look at these six life goals:

1. To enjoy life as a great gift,
2. To develop personal potential and potential as lifetime partners.'
3. To make many close friendships and to enjoy them.
4. To find worthy life goals and to strive to achieve them,
5. To build a happy family.
6. To serve the community in which we live and which serves US.

In preparation of the forth coming "Ten & Ten", we would like to discuss these life goals in light of being a couple. Because of the environment we are in, the discussion will be somewhat structured. Some of the time we will ask you to turn and share with your spouse, other times will be for open sharing as a group.

We will start with an open-sharing question: Aren't you thankful to be alive? Tell us how grateful you are to be alive together. Do you honestly think this and feel thankful? If not, why not? Do you hardly ever think about life? (Presenting couple shares first)

Thank you for sharing.

The second evaluation is also for open sharing. Most people go through life without developing their potential qualities. Is that true of either of you? Are you helping each other develop your special gifts? Who would like to share first?

Thank you for sharing,

Now, another opportunity for open sharing. Here we think of four individual friends and of friends you fully share with each other. Have you ever made lists of those good people to whom you owe so much? Could you share a few with us today?

Thank you for sharing.

This is an opportunity to share with your spouse. If you have children living with you can you claim to be a truly happy family? Is anything in your shared life not working as it should? What can you do together to make it better. Enjoy your time together now.

We need to move on to our next question.

Again share your feelings with your spouse. What are your life goals, as a couple and individually? When you reach the end of your life span, what do you want to have accomplished? Be specific, Start your couple sharing now.

BALANCING GOALS (cont'd)

It's time to move on to our last question.

What are you both doing to serve the community in which you live? Can you list the contributions you're making to your neighbors, to the people in your church, to your town or city? We will openly share our thoughts and comments. Who would like to share first?

Thank you for sharing.

In preparation for the "Ten & Ten" we ask that you listen thoughtfully while we read a short poem by Beverly L. Crabb entitled "The Highwire".

THE HIGHWIRE

On parallel wires
We go through our routines
Dancing different steps
To the same music,
You hear the drums.
I hear the flutes.

The audience thinks we are a pair
The flyers bill us as the "great Funellis's"-
A circus family.
It Is, indeed, a circus.

Sometimes I think
We are not artists,
But clowns,
Sadly smiling clowns.

And yet we balance with the greatest art
And delicacy
Only a touch away
On lines that never meet.

I would like to begin again.
Perhaps I could swing out to you on a sleek trapeze
And tumble toward you, with my hands outstretched
Believing you would reach out to me.

By: Beverly L. Crabb

The ten and ten question is: What are my thoughts and feelings about our coupleness as I listened to the poem "The Highwire:"

Open Sharing Time

Thank you for sharing.

BALANCING GOALS

We will close our presentation with an imaging prayer. Please stand in parallel lines facing your spouse. Close your eyes and balance on your highwire.

Dear God,

We are thankful to be alive, thankful for our potentials and privileges, for our friends and families. We are thankful for our accomplishments and contributions individually. (Relax and now with your eyes still closed, think of yourself swinging on a high trapeze slowly at first, back and forth, back, and forth, back, and forth, back, and forth, back and forth, etc.

Now prepare yourself (pause) for the tumble, back and forth, breathe deeply, back and forth, back and forth.

Reach out - LET GO!, believing that someone will catch You. With hand extended, Reach out and clasp the hands of your partner on their highwire, and in life, hold each other in a safe hug and say "thanks" for being there for me. (pause while you kiss)

Let us pray. Our Faithful God, yes indeed, we are grateful to be alive together; for developing our qualities and gifts with each other, for our good friends whom we owe so much, and the children we share.

Help us to make couple and community goals in our years on this earth, believing that you too, will be there to catch us when we tumble or lose our balance.

We are so thankful to be together in your name, Amen

Happy balancing!

FOCUS PRESENTATION

Wally & Vivian Simon Madison, Wisconsin
Jurisdictional Convention Whitewater, Wisconsin
July 13-15, 1990

Ice Breaker: Share one thing your spouse does for you that you truly appreciate.

Presentation: Spirituality In Our Marriage Means Cherishing Each Other, _

Purpose: To show how expressing our spirituality in marriage not only deepens the couple relationship, but also spreads to others who come in contact ,Keith the couple.

Guidelines For Presentation

I. How we express our spirituality, is not a blind instinct but a decision. (3 min.)

II. Spirituality is an "action word" - a free choice in caring. (1 min.)

III. The more you cherish each other, the more it will spread to others. (5 min.)

IV. How do you cherish each other? What little things, habits, and mannerisms in your mate are dear to you and evoke feelings of lover humor, warmth, and tenderness? How are these related to spirituality? (6 min.)

V. Conclusion: Couples should be left with the conviction that expressing our spirituality is a decision and that the manifestation of it - cherishing others - is very catching.

VI. Read Poem: see attached page

VII. Dialogue Question: Share a specific time when I was aware of how much you cherish me. What were my feelings at that time? Describe them in loving detail.

Suggested dialogue questions to help you write the presentation:

1. Expressing our spirituality is a decision. HDIFAMA? In what ways do I cherish you and how is this related to God? HDIFAMA?
2. How do I show you that I cherish you? What are my feelings about this?
3. How does my expression of spirituality affect those around me? HDIFAMA?

Poem by Leo Buscaglia

Starting each day, I promise myself not to try to
solve all of my life problems at once.

Starting each day, I shall try to learn something
new and to share it with you.

Starting each day, I shall listen to you
with special care and try to see your point of view
and discover the least threatening way to offer you mine.

Starting each day I shall not find fault
with you and try to realize that wherever
you are now is the only place you can be
but that you need not be there tomorrow.

Starting each day, I shall do something
beautiful for you, simply because I will it.

Starting each day, I shall stop to
admire something beautiful, a flower,
a tree, a face, children at play, a
blade of grass, a dew drop on a flower,
and share it with you,

Starting each day, I shall reach
out and touch you gently,

Starting each day, I shall try to discover
something new about myself and about you.

Starting each day, I shall try to experience
you as if you had just been newly born.

Starting each day, I'll dedicate myself again to being your lover
in the broadest sense of the word.

And See What Happens

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BIRD!

A Flame Presentation by Chuck and Mary-Jane Mclean

CHUCK:

Mary-Jane and I are going to read you portions and paraphrase parts of the story of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. We ask you to relate the concepts covered to a dialogue question we will give later. Try to focus on your feelings as we read these excerpts.

MARY-JANE:

"...way off alone, out by himself beyond boat and shore, Jonathan Livingston Seagull was practicing. Seagulls, as you know, never falter, never stall. To stall in the air is for them disgrace and it is dishonor." But Jonathan Livingston Seagull was no ordinary bird. Unashamed, he stretched his wings again in that trembling hard curve --slowing, slowing--and he stalled once more. "Most gulls don't bother to learn more than the simplest facts of flight -- how to get from shore to food and back again. For most gulls, it is not flying that matters, but eating. For this gull, though, it was not eating that mattered, but flight. More than anything else, Jonathan Livingston Seagull loved to fly."

CHUCK:

"The subject was speed, and in a week's practice he learned more about speed than the fastest gull alive." Jonathan kept practicing, and practicing, and practicing -- increasing in skill and speed -- until one morning, partially out of control, he plummeted through the center of the flock of gulls. Fortunately, no one was killed. But Jonathan had reached two hundred fourteen miles per hour! Unheard of before! It was a breakthrough! The flock would be wild with joy!

MARY-JANE:

However, just when Jonathan's hopes and dreams were at a peak, he rejoined the flock anxious to share his news. "The gulls were flocked into the Council Gathering when he landed, and apparently had been flocked for some time."

"'Jonathan Livingston Seagull! Stand to Center!' The elders' words sounded in a voice of highest ceremony. Stand to Center meant only great shame or great honor. 'Of course... they saw the breakthrough this morning!' But I want no honors. I only want to share what I've found..." "Jonathan Livingston Seagull', said the Elder, 'stand to center for shame in the sight of your fellow gulls!'"

CHUCK:

"It felt like being hit with a board." "They can't understand!" "A seagull never speaks back to the Council Flock, but it was Jonathan's voice raised. 'Irresponsibility? My brothers!' he cried. 'Who is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a meaning, a higher purpose for life?'" "The flock might as well have been stone." "...with one accord they solemnly closed their ears and turned their backs upon him."

MARY-JANE:

"Jonathan Seagull spent the rest of his days alone, but he flew way out beyond the Far Cliffs. His one sorrow was not solitude, it was that other gulls refused to believe the glory of flight that awaited them, they refused to open their eyes and see."

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BIRD! (cont'd)

CHUCK:

Those of you who have read the book know that this is not the end, however. Jonathan continued to practice, improve, and reach for perfection.

“They came in the evening, then, and found Jonathan gliding peaceful and alone through his beloved sky. The two gulls that appeared at his wings were pure as starlight, and the glow from them was gentle and friendly in the high night air. But most lovely of all was the skill with which they flew. Their wingtips moving a precise and constant inch from his own.” “Jonathan put them to the test.” They passed with ease. “Who are you?” he asked.

MARY-JANE:

“We’re from your flock, Jonathan. We are your brothers. We’ve come to take you higher, to take you home.”

“Home I have none. Flock I have none. I am outcast. Beyond a few hundred feet, I can lift this old body no higher.”

“But you can, Jonathan. For you have learned. One school is finished, and the time has come for another to begin.”

CHUCK:

Jonathan flew with the two gulls. ‘As he came from earth now, above the clouds and in close formation with the two brilliant gulls, he saw that his own body was growing as bright as theirs. True, the same young Jonathan Seagull was there that had always lived behind his golden eyes, but the outer form had changed.’

His companions left him -- vanishing into thin air. “He was flying over a sea, toward a jagged shoreline.” “Why so few gulls? Heaven should be flocked with gulls!” “The dozen gulls by the shoreline came to meet him, none saying a word. He felt only that he was welcome and that this was home.”

MARY-JANE:

“In the days that followed, Jonathan saw that there was as much to learn about flight in this place as there had been in the life behind him. But with a difference. Here were gulls who thought as he thought. For each of them, the most important thing in living was to reach out and touch perfection in that which they most loved to do.” One day Jonathan asked his instructor, “Why aren’t there more of us here?” His instructor replied that it usually took the living of many lives to reach the level of perfection that Jonathan had reached in one life; and most gulls never looked beyond the idea that their one purpose in life was to eat -- to stay alive.

CHUCK:

Jonathan continued to learn until he had learned the secret of flight as fast as thought. Under the tutelage of the Elder Gull, “Jonathan learned at a tremendous rate. He always had learned quickly from ordinary experience, and now, the special student of the Elder Himself, he took in new ideas like a streamlined feathered computer.” Jonathan learned to fly “the past and the future” and was now ready to begin to “fly up and know the meaning of kindness and love.” According to the Elder Gull this would be “the most difficult, the most powerful, the most fun of all.”

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BIRD! (cont'd)

MARY-JANE:

The day came that the Elder Gull disappeared -- he had gone on to yet a higher level of existence. Jonathan was teaching the new gulls that came in, and finding pleasure in this role, but he “found himself thinking time and again of the Earth from which he had come.” “...he couldn’t help but think that there might be one or two gulls back on Earth who would be trying to learn” how “to break out of his limits, to see the meaning of flight beyond a way of travel to get a breadcrumb from a rowboat.” “How much more would he have known by now if the Elder Gull had come to him on the day that he was Outcast?”

CHUCK:

Jonathan did return, and he gradually gathered a group of young outcast gulls who did see more in flight than a tool to use in the pursuit of mere existence. However, “it is easier for them to practice high performance than it was to understand the reason behind it.”

“Each of us is in truth an idea of the Great Gull, an unlimited idea of freedom, Jonathan would say.” But although they listened, “not one of them ... had come to believe that the flight of ideas could possibly be as real as the flight of wind and feather.”

MARY-JANE:

One day “Jonathan said the time had come to return to the flock.” Over the protestations that they were not ready, would not be welcome and could not go back because they were outcast, Jonathan began the flight back to the flock alone. The others joined him when they had reasoned “we don’t have to obey the law if we’re not a part of the flock, do we?”

CHUCK:

After a dramatic return, and being pointedly ignored by the other gulls after being admonished by the leader -- Jonathan held his practice sessions in full view of the flock. “...for the first time ... pressing his students to the limit of the ability.” “It was a month after the return that the first gull of the flock crossed the line and asked to learn how to fly.”

MARY-JANE:

Eventually the suspicion arose that Jonathan was divine; something he denied. But when one of his older students, Fletcher, meets with a fatal accident and yet lives -- the cries of GOD and DEVIL increase. The culmination is an attempt to destroy Jonathan and Fletcher -- from which attempt they escape, thanks to Jonathan’s skill at flight faster than thought.

CHUCK:

Fletcher says to Jonathan, “I don’t understand how you manage to love a mob of birds that has just tried to kill you.” Jonathan replies, “You don’t love hatred and evil, of course. You have to practice and see the real individual, the good in every one of them and to help them see it themselves. That’s what I mean by love. It’s fun when you get the knack of it.”

Learning to love is like learning to fly when flying is a joy. “I remember a fierce young bird, for instance, Fletcher Seagull, his name, just been made outcast, ready to fight his flock to the death ... and here he is today, building his own heaven instead and leading the whole flock in that direction.”

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BIRD! (cont'd)

MARY-JANE:

“With fright in his eye, Fletcher said: ‘Me leading ... you’re the instructor here, you couldn’t leave.’ ‘Couldn’t I?’ said Jonathan. ‘Don’t you think there might be other flocks that need an instructor more than this one?’ With that, Jonathan, using his advanced skills, suddenly glimmered bright and disappeared. As he disappeared, he admonished, ‘Don’t believe what your eyes are telling you. All they show is limitation. Look with you understanding, find out what you already know and you’ll see the way to fly.’”

CHUCK:

Dialogue Question: What were my thoughts and feelings as I heard this story?

Sharing Question: What are my feelings as a result of this dialogue?

CREDIT: Jonathan Livingston Seagull (a story) by Richard Bach, Avon Books, New York, NY. 1970.

RISKS

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To place your ideas, your dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing and is nothing.

They may avoid suffering and sorrow but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, live.

Chained by their certitudes they are a slave, they are a slave, they have forfeited their freedom.

Only a person who risks is free.

ANNIVERSARY SONG

There was a worry that I had.
When we were young and Love was new
When I had told you everything
There was to tell, what would we do

What would we find to talk about
With both our lives so intertwined
That each of us already knew
The workings of the other's mind?

Well twenty years have come and gone,
And I can giggle at my fears--
For I have never shut my mouth
And you have never closed your ears.

by
Lois Dungan

I do think that spring was given to us as the time to reflect on old actions and consider new ones.
Together let's let spring be the start of the way we will be!

Love is the one treasure that multiplies by division: It is the one gift that grows bigger the more you take from it. It is the one business in which it pays to be an absolute spendthrift: give it away, throw it away., splash it over, empty your pockets, shake the basket, turn the glass upside down, and tomorrow you will have more than ever.

ENCOUNTER

We come to each other,
Our wounds bandaged tight,
With layers of dressings,
Well, hidden from sight.

But the dressings need changing,
And the wounds seek the air,
to heal in the sunshine,
Whenever we dare.

For we all need each other,
And as we earn trust,
Our wounds will be open,
For heal them we must.

I'll peel off one layer,
And test you to see;
Shall I cover it up?
Or will you get to know me?

Raymond E. Lesser, M.D.
La Jolla, Ca.