

Marriage As Covenant – 53:00 40:00

Outline & Mentality - Common Protestant Outline

Thoughts about CPO language

Most Protestant Churches have traditionally avoided using catholic sacramental language to the point where most Protestants no longer understand sacramental language at all. The issue for Protestant presenting couples in this talk is not whether marriage is a sacrament or a covenant or something else. What this talk is trying to teach is that, because God in Christ is a full participant in our marriage covenant, we have grace available to us, especially for healing, AND our marriage relationships are intended to be signs to others of how Christ loves the Church (as in Ephesians 5:25-32). Use language appropriate for your denominational tradition while being conscious of what the talk is trying to teach.

Objective

- to help the couples come to an understanding of their marriage relationship as covenant and what that means for them and the Church

Goals of this presentation

To know

- covenant marriage is a visible sign of God's love
- there are special graces available to them because of their covenant
- the couple relationship is a "little church"

To do

- write a love letter that reflects their unconditional love for each other

To experience

- rekindling their hopes and dreams for their marriage
- being lifted up by the love they have for each other
- their spouse as a gift they should not take for granted

Flow of the presentation

AFTER A SHORT RECAP OF LAST WEEK'S PRESENTATIONS AND HOMEWORK, THE USUAL TIME FOR Q&A, AND A TRANSITION, the Lay couple shares their wedding day, recalling the qualities they admired most in each other and the hopes and dreams they had for their marriage. They focus on their wedding, including reasons for deciding to get married in the Church, their perception of the covenant of marriage, and how they viewed the role of the pastor/priest officiating at their wedding. The Clergy leader and/or spouse teaches about the covenant of marriage and contrasts a covenant love relationship with a contract love relationship, ending with the statement that "marriage is holy and important to the Church." He/she expands on covenant love with scripture from Ephesians 5. The Lay couple personalizes the scripture by illustrating the struggle and joy of loving unconditionally and loving our spouse as we love our own body. They then share their understanding of being "members of His Body," transitioning into the concept of our couple relationship as a "little church."

Each presenting team member illustrates how their relationship with the Church has changed from before their own Marriage Encounter experiences to today, focusing on attitudinal changes.

Clergy leader or spouse gives specific examples of couples living their marriage covenants to the full and their impact on his/her lives (the speaker's) because of the couples' love. The gifts of our covenant of marriage are explained, including the gift of forgiveness and healing. The couples are prepared for the extended dialogue, by hearing that the Church (not just WWME) is praying for them. They hear that each couple has one couple praying especially for them. Marriage As Covenant concludes with a song.

Connection with other presentations

In Marriage As Covenant the couples learn that they are a sign of Christ's love for each other. They also learn that, as a couple, they are a sign of Christ's love for the Church.

This talk prepares and motivates the couples for Living Our Covenant, in which they will learn how to be a living, breathing sign of Christ's love for the Church.

Caution:

Marriage As Covenant is not a theological dissertation on marriage. It is a personal witness to the joyous lifestyle of a covenantal relationship that reveals Christ's presence in the world.

NOTE ABOUT 3RE:

IN THE COMMENTS FOLLOWING THE PILOTING OF THE 3RE BY WWME, PRESENTERS NOTED "AWKWARDNESS" IN ENDING THE SESSION, PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY HAD TO WAIT A WEEK TO WITNESS THE "HIGH" OF THE EXTENDED DIALOGUE'S FEEDBACK. THEY GAVE THE COUPLES A CHOICE: STAY THERE TO WRITE AND DIALOGUE OR GO HOME IF THEY HAD PRIVACY, AND COUPLES VARIED. MORE EXPERIENCE MIGHT REVEAL THE BEST WAY TO END THE EVENING; IN THE MEANTIME, CONSIDER IT CAREFULLY AND PRAYERFULLY, DEPENDING ON WHAT YOU KNOW OF THESE COUPLES THE LORD HAS GIVEN YOU FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS. SEE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS IN VIII.

CONSIDER GIVING OUT WITH PDA OR MAILING A PERSONAL LETTER TO EACH COUPLE (DIVIDING THE LIST AMONG PRESENTERS). IT MIGHT INCLUDE:

- ***WHAT HARD WORK/GROWTH/LOVE YOU HAVE WITNESSED***
- ***THAT THEY MIGHT WONDER WHAT MORE THERE COULD BE TO COME, BUT THAT IT'S IMPORTANT TO COME AND FIND OUT***
- ***THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING UP WITH THE MISSION POSSIBLE AND DIALOGUE QUESTIONS***
- ***THAT PRESENTERS ARE STILL AVAILABLE.***

I. RECAP (CL AND/OR CS: 3:00)

AFTER THE USUAL WELCOME BACK AND TRANSITION, A RECAP MIGHT INCLUDE REFERENCE TO INCREASING FITNESS FROM THE CLIMB. LAST WEEK WE STRETCHED SOME MUSCLES THAT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN USED MUCH BEFORE, IN SHARING FEELINGS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO SHARE, WHICH MAY HAVE RESULTED IN SOME PAIN. BUT WE HOPE THEY UNDERSTAND THE POWER THAT DAILY DIALOGUE CAN HAVE IN STRENGTHENING THEIR MARRIAGES, BIT BY BIT, DAY BY DAY, TO KEEP THEM IN TOP SHAPE.

II. QUESTION & ANSWER TIME (CL AND/OR CS: 10:00)

AS USUAL, BE PREPARED TO READ AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS IN THE JAR AND ASK:

- ***HOW HAS YOUR WEEK GONE?***
- ***WHAT NEW THINGS HAVE YOU LEARNED?***
- ***WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?***

III. Introduction and optional opening prayer (LH or LW: 0:30)

State:

HERE WE ARE NEARLY AT THE SUMMIT OF THIS EXPERIENCE. YOU HAVE TRUSTED US SO FAR AND WE HOPE YOU AGREE IT'S BEEN WORTH ALL THE ENERGY YOU'VE PUT IN. The title of this talk is "Marriage As Covenant." It can be found on page ___ of your Workbook. During this presentation, we ask our brothers and sisters of other faiths to think of your own church's practices and traditions as we talk about ours.

Opening prayer (optional):

Suggested wording:

Heavenly Father, we ask you to open our hearts to the beauty of our marriage and to awaken in us an awareness of how vitally important our marriage is to the Church.

IV. Our wedding day (LH & LW: 3:00 total)

NOTE:

One Lay spouse shares all of A & B, then the other Lay spouse shares all of A & B.

IV A. Our dream when we got married

IV A 1. What qualities made my spouse special to me?

IV A 2. What were my hopes and dreams for our life together?

Briefly share the qualities you most admired and appreciated in your spouse (sense of humor, generosity, compassion, gentleness, confidence, playfulness, spontaneity, etc.) and then share some of the dreams you had for your future as husband and wife.

IV B. Our wedding in the Church

IV B 1. What was my focus for our wedding?

Without repetition, Lay husband and wife share your primary focus of your wedding day; the day you formally pledged your love and commitment to each other. Share the details of that day (the ceremony, the readings and music, the photos, guests, and reception, etc.). You may also share your feelings and memories of the day; perhaps mention those present with you to celebrate your commitment. This is not meant to be merely a nostalgic look back at your wedding day, but will support what you share in II B 2-4 about why you may have decided to get married in the Church and about not fully realizing the meaning of the covenant of marriage at that time.

IV B 2. Why did I/we decide to get married in the Church?

Share honestly why you chose to get married in the Church, if you did. Was it tradition? Was it because your family expected it? Maybe it just seemed like the right thing to do. If you weren't active in the Church then, share from your perspective at the time. If you were married in a civil ceremony or non-church ceremony, why did you later decide you needed the life and ministry of the Church or a personal relationship with the Lord in your marriage?

IV B 3. At that time, what did the covenant of marriage mean to me?

IV B 4. How did I see the role of the pastor/priest at our wedding?

Share what the covenant of marriage meant to you. Did you think it was something you received from the celebrant? Was the pastor/priest there as a functionary to perform the ceremony? Did the covenant have real meaning to you? If you did have a good understanding of the covenant, how did that affect your attitudes and focus on your wedding day?

NOTE:

This section links directly with **VI A** when you share how your perception of the Church has changed since your Marriage Encounter experience.

V. A covenant love -- the kind of love we need (8:00 total)

This section teaches about marriage partly by pointing out what our covenant is not (it is more than a contractual agreement between two consenting adults).

V A. Contract-type of love relationship vs. covenant-type relationship (CL and/or CS: 5:00)

NOTE:

The Clergy couple has the freedom to talk about the following concepts (V A 1 & 2) in whatever order they wish, provided all of the points are covered.

V A 1. Explain the difference between a contract and a covenant

Begin by stating that a covenant is a relationship based on unconditional love – similar to the one God made with the Israelites when God said "I will be your God and you will be my people," or "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

- A covenant is all about a loving relationship, vs. a contract that is "quid pro quo;" i.e., "if you do this, I'll do that."
- A contract is a conditional agreement where if one party doesn't abide by the terms then the other party doesn't have to either, whereas a covenant is unconditional.
- A contract is often a 50/50 agreement. A contract ensures what I will get out of the agreement. A contract can be terminated, whereas a covenant is forever.
- A contract has limits; a covenant has limitless possibilities.
- A covenant love is the unconditional love that one spouse has for the other that will sustain the marriage.

V A 2. Explain how marriage is a covenant

Tell the couples that marriage between a Christian man and woman is not only a covenant, but also a sign of God's love. Therefore, the love of spouses for each other is meant to be a visible reflection of God's boundless, unconditional love. To experience the unconditional love of one's spouse is to experience God's love. When others witness the love a couple has for each other they are getting a glimpse of God's love. In other words, this love is not theirs to keep hidden. Christ revealed through the love of a married couple is an awesome grace that is meant for the whole Church. End with the statement "Marriage is holy and important to the Church," then look at the couples – make direct eye contact – and say to them, "You are an outward sign of God's love."

It is a powerful moment when a pastor/priest affirms their marriage as a magnificent sign to him/her personally and to the whole Church. Use language appropriate to your denominational tradition while trying to help them understand their marriage is theologically important.

Formation:

(CPO Note: The following is Roman Catholic teaching on marriage. Use the teaching of your own denomination.)

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." Canon 1055. The Church teaches that because marriage between a baptized man and a baptized woman is a covenant, it has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament. The Catholic Church understands sacraments as those moments or actions by which God sends his grace into our lives. In marriage, that grace - the presence of Christ in their relationship - makes it possible for a husband and wife to live out their marriage vows to love each other in good times and in bad, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Their "yes" to love each other in this way is by its very nature unlimited and unconditional and parallels the covenant love Jesus has with the Church. there can be no greater love than covenant love. Thus covenant love is not less than sacramental love, and a covenant marriage is not less than sacramental marriage. They are the same. Marriage is a sacrament because it is a covenant between a baptized man and a baptized woman.

V A 3. Read Ephesians 5:21, 25-33 and comment briefly

CL or CS reads Ephesians 5:21, 25-33.

Suggested wording for transition:

St. Paul talked about marriage in this way:

"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband." (NRSV)

Comment briefly on the text just read. Wording below can be adapted:

Just as Christ loves us, the Church, and gave Himself completely, unconditionally for us, so in marriage, as husband and wife, you become one flesh and give yourselves totally to each other. You are establishing a covenant of love. The love of husband and wife should have no limits. You are called to grow more and more loving towards each other. Your model is Jesus' love for His people.

V B. Reflection on Ephesians (LH & LW: 3:00 total)

V B 1. What unconditional love means to me (LH or LW: 1:00)

Dividing V B as desired, one Lay spouse shares a reflection on Ephesians 5:21, 25-33, focusing on the unspoken call in Ephesians to love unconditionally, just as Christ loves the Church. Share what it means to you to love your spouse unconditionally. You are not called to love your spouse only when he/she is behaving in a certain way (e.g., loving, thoughtful), but without conditions.

Formation:

God does not love me only when I am acting holy. God loves me unconditionally – always – simply for who I am. That is how we are called to love our spouse. Unconditional love also means we are committed to loving our spouse forever, just as God loves us forever. There is no actual reference in the scripture passage to the words “unconditional love” so it is helpful to draw the participants’ attention to specific wording from which we infer this concept. We surrender the limits we sometimes place on our love and choose to love our spouse unconditionally. Unconditional love describes what we promise to do when we state our vows on our wedding day. We promise to love the other in good times and in bad, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, etc. When we love each other unconditionally, we are giving each other, and all who see us loving each other in this way, a glimpse of how intimately and personally God loves us.

(For in-depth formation about the meaning of the Ephesians scripture, presenting teams may want to read the book *What Paul Really Said About Women* by John Temple Bristow.)

V B 2. Share on what it means to love my spouse as my own body (LH or LW: 1:00)

Either Lay spouse reflects on Ephesians 5:21, 25-33, focusing on your understanding of what it means to love your spouse as your own body. Make it clear that, as husband and wife, we are responsible for the health and vitality of our relationship, just as we are responsible for the health and vitality of our body.

V B 3. Share on my understanding of: "We are members of His Body" (LH or LW: 1:00)

Either Lay spouse reflects on Ephesians 5:21, 25-33, focusing on your personal understanding of “We are members of His Body” rather than how you relate to this concept in a theological or intellectual way. Explain that as baptized Christians, and particularly as married couples, we are a part of the Church, the living Body of Christ on earth. Explain that the choices we make to live our marriage do not affect just our own relationship, but the whole Church. Our lives are intertwined, not isolated. Conclude with the statement that “We are the Church” to introduce the concept of our couple relationship being a “little church” in the next section.

VI. We are the Church (10:00 total)

VI A. How our relationship with the Church has changed

(LH & LW and CL & CS: 1:30 each)

Share specifically how your relationship with the Church, the Body of Christ, has changed from before your Marriage Encounter experience to today. Focus primarily on your changes in attitude and your new awareness of who, rather than what, the Church is for you now. Be clear that it is not the Church that has changed to be more open or welcoming or inspiring. Emphasize that your awareness of the Church now is not about the institution or the structure of the Church, but the PEOPLE – your relationships with them – becoming FAMILY! Also include how your relationships with clergy has changed since your Marriage Encounter experience. This may link to section **IV B.**, particularly the role of the pastor/priest officiating on your wedding day.

The Clergy leader's focus is personal (see above paragraph), as well as on how your awareness, perception, and relationship with your people (the Church) has changed and how your lifestyle in the Church has changed since your Marriage Encounter experience (or Deeper Weekend). Perhaps you now realize that ordained clergy and married couples complement and support one another in living their callings, becoming true companions on a journey of faith. Be specific in illustrating the changes in your life as a pastor/priest with your people.

VI B. The couple relationship is a "little church" (LH or LW: 2:00)

Suggested wording transition:

The relationship of a couple truly living a marriage that is filled with the same gifts of our big Church – love, mercy, forgiveness, tradition, and symbolism –is therefore a little church. Your love relationship is a sign that is meant to mirror the gifts of our Church. You have an opportunity to share your “little church” by reaching out to others around you, giving them a glimpse of God’s love.

We, as a couple, are a little church in the ways that we...

- reach out to others
- pray for others
- show mercy and forgiveness
- show unconditional love (e.g., tenderness, selfless love)
- establish and maintain Christian traditions
- display sacred symbols in our home

You might refer to the fact that Christ sent out his apostles two by two to preach, teach and heal. In the same way, we as couples, are called to be a team of two, “a little Church.” Jesus also promised that, where two or more are gathered, He is in their midst.

This is a personal sharing of how the two of you, as a couple, reach out to others, pray for others, show mercy and forgiveness, etc.

Suggested ending for this section:

Every day, we, as a couple, have the opportunity to reach out to others by bringing to them the many gifts of the little church.

Formation:

In Paragraph 2204, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church. It is a community of faith, hope and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament.” When we refer to the “little church,” we are speaking not just of a Worldwide Marriage Encounter concept, but of a core teaching of our faith.

Our couple relationship is like the Church, exhibiting traits and yielding gifts for those around us. In this way we as a couple are a “little church.” All families, when joined as one, make up the larger Church.

As a "little church," we are filled with the gifts of love, mercy, forgiveness, tradition, and symbolism, just like the big Church. Our little church is a place where faith is lived out in concrete ways. Just as Jesus laid down His life for us, the Church, we also “lay down our lives” for others by sacrificing for the sake of our family and others, by praying for them and by showing mercy and forgiveness. When we tell each other, no matter what happens, I will always be there, we are modeling our love on God’s unconditional love.

In our little church, we also have traditions for different seasons of the year just like the big Church. We have special prayers we recite before meals and at bedtime. We may pray in restaurants and we may hold hands when we pray to remind us that we are on this journey together. Perhaps on special occasions we bring out the best china and the silverware and put candles and flowers on our table, similar to the way the big Church celebrates special days.

These traditions are part of what make us a family and give us a faith identity. The big Church has sacred symbols—things like the cross/crucifix/tabernacle--and we have sacred symbols like our wedding rings or the family Bible. Some homes have statues or paintings of Christ and some homes have a prayer corner. Perhaps we have a blessing cup that is brought out to mark special times of joy or sorrow.

Most importantly, the gift that the little church brings to the big Church isn’t how perfect we are, but how we keep growing in the graces of our sacrament and strive every day to love each other as Jesus loves us.

VI C. Living examples of the covenant of marriage (CL: 2:00)

Give examples of two specific couples (first names only), who have impacted you in how they live their lives, who have inspired you because of their covenantal love. Share how they have affected you in the way they reach out with love, forgiveness, or mercy, not only in their own relationship, but also with others. Don't be afraid to share about couples who live a radical lifestyle because of their covenantal love.

VII. The gifts of our covenant (8:30 total, with transition; 3:00 for A - C)

Transition statement – read as is (by the Lay spouse continuing into A, below):

Through the presence of Christ in our relationship, we have been given many extraordinary gifts. These gifts include contagious love, being life-giving, being raised above the ordinary, and healing. You can find them listed on page _____ of your Workbook. Through these gifts of our marriage, God is tangible and visible. These gifts are meant not only for ourselves, but are also meant for the benefit of the Church and the world.

VII A. Contagious love (LH or LW: A and C; other Lay spouse: B; 3:00 for A - C)

Give an example of how your love is contagious to the point that anyone who experiences it can't help but be affected and "want what you have" even though they can't really identify what "it" is. Share how important it is for people around you to experience your love which is a sign of Christ's love. Our love for each other, the way we look at each other, touch each other and speak to each other encourages those around us to do the same. You can also give an example of how seeing the way other couples love each other gives you the desire to be more for each other.

VII B. Being life-giving (Other Lay spouse)

Share how your love also gives life to those around you. Your love brings new life, sometimes through the gift of a child, and also through the effects of your love on those around you. Think of the immeasurable love and patience you have to share with others because it overflows from the love you share as a couple. Your love is life-giving when you recognize potential in others and cultivate their unique gifts. Your love is life-giving when it affirms and inspires others. Give a personal example of how your love is powerful and gives life to others.

VII C. Raised above the ordinary (Lay spouse who did transition and A)

Being raised above the ordinary makes it possible to grow and even thrive through difficult periods and crises that might well tear other marriages apart. The gift of being raised above the ordinary helps us to know with certainty that because of our love for each other and because of the presence of Jesus in our love we can grow even stronger as a couple during times of difficulty. Teach and give a personal example.

Formation:

Being raised above the ordinary means that we are raised above defeating attitudes or destructive behaviors that often strain marriages during difficult times.

For example, we were able to encourage and support our spouse when he or she lost a job rather than blaming or pressuring each other. When one of our children was in trouble in school, we didn't succumb to the strife and dissension that could have occurred in our relationship. Instead we bonded together and relied on each other. We grew even stronger as a couple because of the presence of Christ in our relationship.

VII D. Healing (LH & LW: 5:00)

VII D 1. The power of healing is available to us

Suggested wording:

One of the most precious gifts is the gift of healing. Unhealed hurts tend to accumulate and become barriers to our intimacy, so they must be healed. The way to activate this gift is to open our hearts to Christ's presence in our relationship. Healing usually begins with asking for and giving forgiveness and it is completed by loving each other unconditionally. This special gift of healing is available to all of us.

VII D 2. Couple's sharing of the experience of healing

Lay husband and wife together share one personal example of healing in your relationship that is not a huge, traumatic one, but an everyday example shared in a way that the participants will believe that they, too, can open this gift in their marriage. This healing sharing should be shared in an interplay fashion without duplication. Be sure to include non-verbals and feeling descriptions. The intent of this sharing is to show how we can use this gift every day, not just in the context of dialogue. Be sure to include that forgiveness does not mean excusing the behavior.

Whatever experience of healing you share should be outside the experience of dialogue.

Conclude this section by describing how the healing began and how the healing progressed. What was happening in your relationship that showed that healing was occurring? Be specific.

We need to make it clear in this section that the forgiveness was the beginning of the healing. We don't want to make it appear as if asking for forgiveness immediately heals all of the hurts.

VII D 3. Motivation to use the gift of healing in our everyday lives

God has given us a wonderful gift of healing, and when it is used frequently in marriage, it can restore our fractured relationship to wholeness. The presence of Christ in our marriage makes it possible to forgive even when we don't feel very loving. Remind the couples that healing is a process, not something that happens instantly, and is available for little everyday hurts as well as big hurts. Tell them how continuing to use this gift of healing love in their everyday lives, by both asking for and giving forgiveness, can keep the little hurts from becoming big hurts. Let them know that when they truly forgive each other, they no longer carry grudges to dump on each other at a later time.

Look the couples directly in the eyes and tell them that they cannot underestimate the incredible power the words "will you forgive me?" and "yes, I forgive you" have to bring renewed life and intimacy into their relationship.

VIII. Preparation for extended dialogue (10:00 total – including song)

Throughout this section it is important to make eye contact with the couples. Enthusiasm is important, but be careful not to interject your own expectations.

VIII A. Introduce extended dialogue (CL or CS: 1:00)

CL or CS gives a transition. This needs to be a clear statement of what is about to take place. This introduction should be positive and optimistic for the couples. Tell them that this is an opportunity for growth in their relationship that they may never have experienced before. Introduce the Extended Dialogue by specifically telling them they will be writing for 75 minutes and dialoguing for 75 minutes (or the timing chosen by the sponsoring Faith Expression). Don't go into the nuts and bolts of how they are going to do it, who stays in conference room, etc. Those details will be covered in B.

VIII B. Give instructions (LH and/or LW: 2:00)

Begin this section with a transition telling them your reaction when you heard the amount of time given for this dialogue.

The question sheet can be given out now (put in their notebooks unopened) or just before playing the song. Then give the details of how to plan for this next phase. Keep it positive and cover the following points (allowing for local custom):

- The questions for the next dialogue will be handed to you (either now or just before the song at the end of the presentation. Put them unopened in your notebooks/workbooks).
- Husbands will stay in the conference room to write (recommended).
- Don't open the paper until you are ready to start writing.
- Spend as much time as possible on questions 1 and 2.
- Wait until you finish these first questions, questions 1 and 2, before going on.
- It's okay if you don't get past the first two questions; many people don't.
- There are several questions for this dialogue time, but you are not expected to answer all of them.
- For this love letter, it's OK to explore your thoughts, ideas, and opinions, but as feelings emerge focus on them and describe them fully.
- Eliminate distractions.
- Stay focused on your writing.
- Make your spouse the focus of the next ___ hours.
- "Hot pen" technique: if you run out of things to write, just write "I love you" until the words start flowing again.
- For the verbal part of the dialogue, stay together in your room until we call you back.
- Nothing is more important during this extended dialogue time than you and your spouse.

VIII C. Motivation

VIII C 1. The Church is praying for you

(C 1 & 2: LH and/or LW: 2:00)

This section gives the presenters the opportunity to share in their own words what a wonderful experience this can be. Explain that there are many people supporting the couples in their efforts during this time. In your own words, share that many people are aware of them and praying for them right now.

VIII C 2. One couple is praying especially for you - explain

Let the couples know that they each have a specific prayer couple who is praying for them. Tell them what it means to you when you are a prayer couple and mention some of the ways that you keep your couple in your prayers throughout the Marriage Encounter experience.

VIII C 3. This time is profoundly important to you, to us, to the Church (CL or CS: 1:00)

Share your hopes and dreams for them, but be sensitive to their apprehension. Be careful not to promise something you can't deliver. Be encouraging and passionate, but don't share experiences that may be unachievable. Let the couples have their own special time. Share with them how God is truly a part of their relationship and how He has given them this time to help them grow in their closeness and deepen their intimacy.

VIII C 4. Song: If Tomorrow Never Comes

(CL or CS: 4:00 – including 3:40 for song)

Briefly introduce the song and ask the couples to pay close attention to the words.

Questions: Extended Dialogue Handout

Writing time: 60:00-75:00

Dialogue time: 60:00-75:00

Husbands stay in the conference room to write (recommended).

NOTE:

WITH MORE PRACTICE OF PRESENTING THE 3RE'S, MORE SUGGESTIONS WILL NO DOUBT SURFACE ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO END THIS SESSION. ARE YOU GIVING OUT THEIR PERSONAL LETTERS WITH A HUG AS THEY LEAVE, ALONG WITH THEIR WEEKLY PDA HOMEWORK (WHICH IS NOT MENTIONED IN THE TALK AS IT IS QUITE SELF-EXPLANATORY AT THIS POINT), OR DO YOU INVITE THEM BACK TO THE CONFERENCE ROOM FOR SOME TIME OF QUIET PRAYER, MUSIC, BLESSING, AND/OR MEDITATION?

You might divide up the couple list among the team and write each couple a letter to Motivate them to return for next week.

Content of the letter could be:

- We are so excited for all of you at this point on our journey.**
- We see the glow in your faces and we know that climbing the mountain has been rewarding for you.**
- We aren't done yet and we ask you to join us again next week.**
- You might be thinking "What more is there?"**
- We want to share with you ways to sustain this joy you are feeling and not let it become just a memory.**
- Don't forget to do your workout between now and then, Mission Possible and DQ.**
- Remember, we are here for you and want to hear from you during the week. Let us know if you are having struggles or need support.**
- Please join us next week. You've worked hard to get to the mountain top. Let's stay up here awhile and bask in the beauty.**

How we live out the concepts of this talk:

We live out the concepts of Marriage As Covenant by living with our spouse in a covenant relationship of love. We are aware that marriage is holy and important to the Church. We believe that through the presence of Christ in our relationship, our love becomes contagious, life-giving, raised about the ordinary, and healing. We use the gifts of our covenant to nurture our relationship and to build up the body of Christ. We believe our covenantal couple relationship is a “little church” that is called to be a sign of Christ’s love for each other and for the Church.

An assessment for us as a couple:

- Do we see ourselves being a sign of Christ’s love for the Church? How?
- Are we willing to live a radically different lifestyle? How?
- Do we use the gifts of our covenant to nurture our relationship? How?
- Are there any emotional hurts in our relationship that need healing now?
- Have we dialogued on Ephesians 5:21, 25-33?
- What does it mean to me to be “members of His Body?”
- Does our “little church” bring our covenant to our Church and the world?
- Who are the married couples that inspire us to live a radical lifestyle?
- If I was not here tomorrow, would you know how much I loved you?

Dialogue questions to help the presenting team develop their presentation:

HDIF? How do I feel? HDIFA? HDIF about?

HDIFAT? HDIFA this (or that)? HDIFAMA? HDIFA my answer?

HDIFTYT? HDIF telling you this?

1. What were my hopes and dreams for our married life in the time before we were married? HDIFAMA?
2. What quality(ies) made you special to me at the time of our marriage? HDIFAMA?
3. On the day of our marriage what was my primary focus? HDIFAMA?
4. What was the significance of the place where we chose to get married? HDIFAT?
5. What was the significance of our marriage in the church? HDIFAMA?
6. At the time we were married, what did I believe the role of the pastor/priest to be? HDIFAMA?
7. What did I believe the function of the pastor/priest to be on our original Marriage Encounter experience? HDIFAMA?
8. How do I view the role of the pastor/priest in our lives now? HDIFAMA?
9. How have our lives been touched by a relationship with a pastor/priest? HDIFAMA?
10. How has my life been affected by a relationship with other couples? HDIFAMA?
11. What do I understand our covenant to be? HDIFAMA?
12. What do I understand a contract to be? HDIFAMA?
13. Do we have a covenant love? HDIFAMA?
14. HDIF when I read Ephesians 5:21, 25-32?
15. HDIF when I read Ephesians 5:21-24?
16. How have I loved you unconditionally in the past two weeks? HDIFAMA?

Marriage As Covenant
Outline & Mentality – CPO - 3RE

17. Do I love my own body? HDIFAMA?
18. How do I show my love for my body? HDI FAMA?
19. How do I love you as I love my own body? HDIFAMA?
20. Share a recent example of how our love has been contagious? HDIFAMA?
21. How are we life-giving? HDIFAMA?
22. Share a time when you have raised me above the ordinary? HDIFTYT?
23. Have I hurt you in the last week? HDIFTYT?
24. Have I been hurt by you in the last week? HDIFTYT?
25. Because of who I am is it difficult for me to ask for forgiveness? HDIFAMA?
26. Are there any hurts in our relationship that now need healing? HDIFAMA?
27. HDIF when I hear the words “We are Church”?
28. Do I see us as a little church? HDIFAMA?
29. How have we shared the gifts of our little church? HDIFAMA?
30. Since our Marriage Encounter experience, how has our relationship with the Church and the Lord changed? HDIFAMA?
31. What couple(s) have touched our lives? HDIFAMA?
32. How have these couples touched our lives? HDIFAMA?
33. How did I feel when I was asked to write an extended love letter?
34. HDIF recalling our extended dialogue on our original Marriage Encounter experience?
35. HDIF knowing that one special couple is praying for us on a Marriage Encounter experience?

**MARRIAGE AS COVENANT
EXTENDED DIALOGUE HANDOUT**

1. What are my reasons for wanting to go on living? What are my reasons for wanting to go on living with you?
2. What are my hopes and dreams for our marriage?
3. What are the qualities which made you special to me when we first met? What are the qualities which make you special to me now?
4. How do I think you need me now?
5. Do I see and accept you as you are? Please explain.
6. Do I see and accept myself as I really am? Please explain.
7. What are my feelings about our sexual relationship?
8. How do I feel about the role of God, or the absence of God, in our relationship?
9. Do I believe that the way we love each other can really affect other people (friends and children)? Please explain.