



# Family Retreat: Nurturing and Sustaining Christian Marriage as an Efficacious Sign, the Sacrament of the Covenant of Christ and the Church

*Peter J. Murphy, MA in Counseling and MA in Theology  
Director of Office of Family Life, Archdiocese of Washington*

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## Purpose

This time for retreat is designed to assist families in realizing how their married life is a life-giving sign to the Church and the world. The retreat is based on prayer, readings, and selected activities to help couples nurture and strengthen their marriage and families. It will take ninety minutes to two hours.

## Materials Needed

- Small prayer table with cloth, Bible, candle, plant, and cross or crucifix
- Round tables for families or participants to gather around, or rectangular tables allowing participants to sit facing one another
- Paper and pencils for each participant (and crayons for children)
- Copies of Handout A, “Family Tree” (one for each family), and Handout B, “The Vocation to Marriage” (one for each family)
- One Bible for each table of participants
- Table for refreshments
- Podium for leader
- Copy of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2006)
- Copy (optional) of *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, revised edition (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007)

- Television and DVD player
- Copy of *Vocation to Marriage: Vocation to Love and Service of Life* (*Vocation to Marriage* is one part of a vocational DVD series titled Everyone Has a Vocation to Love: What's Yours? The DVDs are free, with a \$3.00 shipping fee. Contact Knights of Columbus, Department of Fraternal Services, (203) 752-4270 or order a copy at [kofc.org/un/vorder/videos.action](http://kofc.org/un/vorder/videos.action))

## Preparation

- Prepare the room by setting up tables and chairs.
- Put paper and pencils on the tables.
- Set up the prayer table.
- Place a Bible on each table.
- Set up the refreshment table.
- Have the DVD player ready and tested.

## Schedule

Welcome and Gathering (10 minutes)

Family Tree Activity (20 minutes)

Break (10 minutes)

Video: *Vocation to Marriage* (30 minutes)

Family Discussion and Sharing (10 minutes)

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

## RETREAT

### *Welcome and Gathering (10 minutes)*

Welcome everyone with words of introduction. Ask all families and family members to introduce themselves. Lead an opening prayer (e.g., *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (2007 revised edition), 184-187, or the following):

*(All make the Sign of the Cross.)*

**Leader:** Loving Father, you have brought us all here today to celebrate marriage and to strengthen our bonds of love to one another and to you. We thank you for the gift of the Sacrament of Marriage, where you brought together these men and women so that they might faithfully and fruitfully love one another. Bless their families present here today and those unable to be here. We pray for all marriages that are going through difficulties and for those who are separated. Be with us now Lord as we share with one another your loving plan for marriage.

**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** A reading from the Apostle Paul to the Philippians.

*(Leader reads Philippians 1:3-11.)*

**Leader:** The Word of the Lord.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

*(Time of silent reflection, followed by all offering prayers of intercession for our families.)*

**Leader:** Let us unite hands as we pray the Lord's Prayer.

*(All pray the Lord's Prayer.)*

**Leader:** Lord, you created marriage to be a sign of your love to the Church and to the world. Bless these families as we contemplate marriage and family life. Help us and all to grow in appreciation of your loving plan begun in creation for our salvation.

**All:** Amen.

### ***Family Tree Activity (20 minutes)***

#### **1. Our family's story**

**Leader:** Marriage is more than just a contract; it is a covenant that spouses make with each other and with God. The husband and wife create the covenant with their consent, and God seals the covenant and provides all the strength and grace a couple needs to love one another in good times and in bad. It is the same God that blesses the family, the domestic Church, to be a place for all its members to learn to be loved and to love one another. This is not always easy and takes a lot of work, but with God, good can come from even the most difficult of circumstances. Indeed, it is through the daily activities, the love and the struggles, that married couples and their families grow in holiness. Marriage is a vocation, a calling by God, to bring together a man and woman into a lifelong, loving bond that is open to children. *(Use the USCCA, 277-292, for more ideas if needed.)*

*(Ask the spouses to begin by sharing with their family the story of how they met, fell in love, and knew this was the person God was calling them to marry. Encourage the*

*children to ask questions. Let children know that they may be called to marriage like their parents, to priesthood or consecrated life, or perhaps to single life.)*

## **2. Introduction of activity**

*(Read Matthew 5:14-16 aloud to the group.)*

*(Introduce the activity, using the following text as a script or model.)*

**Leader:** In this gospel reading, Christ encourages us to let our light shine for the whole world to see. As families, we reflect Christ to the world in a variety of ways. Our lives may seem ordinary, but this ordinary life, lived extraordinarily, can draw others to Christ.

God works in and through our families. This activity will help us see our roles as families to strengthen our marriage and family bonds and also to influence the larger world around us.

## **3. Completing the Family Tree Activity**

*(Distribute copies of Handout A, "Family Tree," to each family. Instruct the families about how to complete the activity, with words such as the following.)*

**Leader:** Work with your family to fill in the Family Tree handout. John Paul II wrote *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)* to help families realize their exalted place in the world. As families, we have a mission in the world. In this document, he outlined four tasks that all families are called to fulfill:

- a. Developing a community of loving persons
- b. Serving life
- c. Helping in society
- d. Sharing in the life and mission of the Church

Read through each task and discuss how you as a family do or can fulfill these tasks. You will see examples of each of the tasks on the handout. No family is a perfect family, and we all strive to be the best we can be. If you fall short in an area, don't get down, but see this as an opportunity for growth.

On the handout, notice the trunk of the tree. Parents, you are the foundation and trunk of this tree. You are the primary educators of your children. Write your names in the trunk of the tree.

As a family, you will need to decide how you fulfill each of these tasks. This is the fruit of your family life and how you bless each other and the world. When you agree on a family answer, write it down on the handout. If you have children, you can have them draw a picture of your family putting this task into action.

*(After everyone has finished, invite members of each household to briefly share their responses to one or two of the tasks with the group. As part of the closing prayer, each household will be invited to place its handout on the prayer table as a means of thanking God for all he is doing in and through our families.)*

**Break (10 minutes)**

**The Vocation to Marriage video (30 minutes)**

*(This video shows a variety of families living out their marital vows in their daily lives.)*

**Family Discussion and Sharing (10 minutes)**

*(Distribute Handout B, "The Vocation to Marriage." Have the family answer each of the questions; be sure that all family members are consulted. After seven or eight minutes, ask families to share one or two of their answers with the group.)*

**Closing Prayer (10 minutes)**

**Leader:** Father, we ask your blessings on our families today. We have reflected on the many ways you have spoken to us and reveal yourself to us. We have also shared in the many ways that your love has empowered our families to witness you to the world. As we place our Family Trees on the prayer table, we thank you for all that you are doing through our families to bless others.

Please bring your family trees forward and place them on our prayer table.

We are also aware of the many other family members and friends in need of our prayers. So we take time now to offer our prayers to you.

*(Families can offer their own prayers. After each prayer, all should respond with "Lord, hear our prayer.")*

**Leader:** Let us pray for God's blessing on our families and friends. May the Lord bless our marriages to be strong, faithful witnesses of his love to the world. May the Lord guide all our children to discern his voice in their lives that they may follow his call for them. May the Lord bless each and every one of you today and always.

**All:** Amen.

*(All make the Sign of the Cross.)*

*(Thank everyone for coming, and encourage them to make use of [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org) for more marriage enrichment ideas.)(If possible, invite all participants to attend a special Mass, or perhaps a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass, at which they receive a special blessing or renew their vows before their family and neighbors.)*

**Resources**

Pope John Paul II. *The On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 1982.

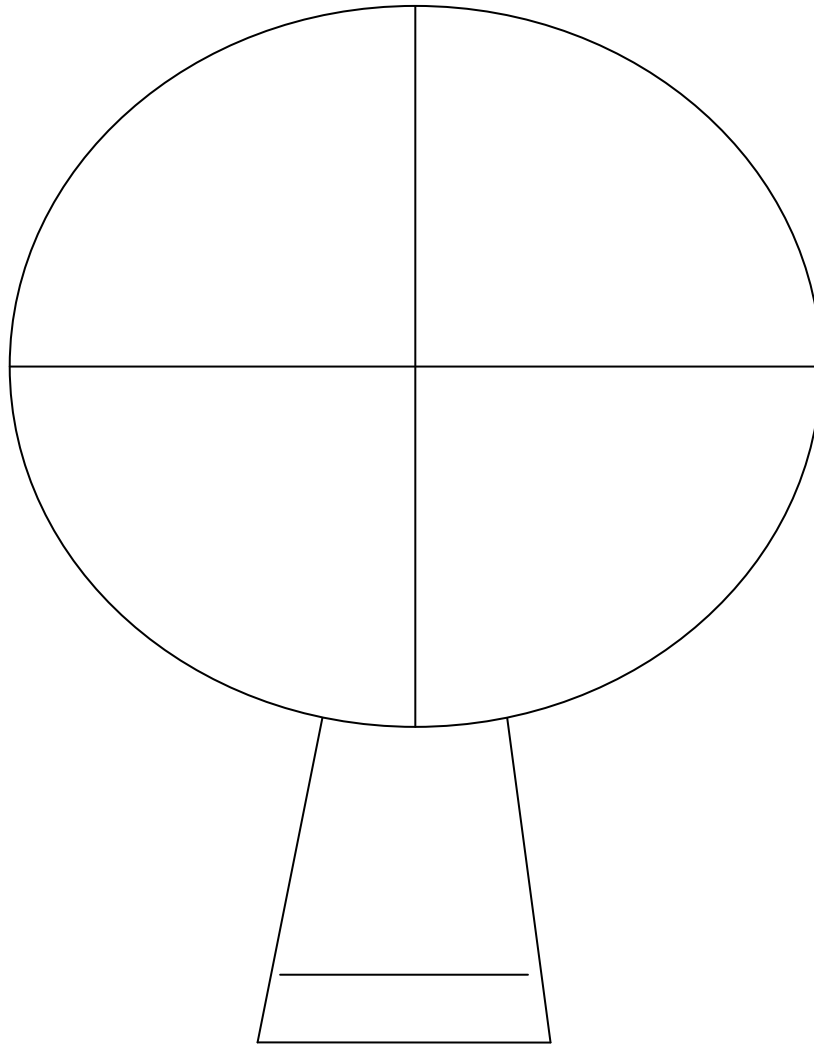
USCCB Committee on the Liturgy. *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, revised edition. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007.

USCCB. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006.

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### ***Handout A: Family Tree***

The trunk of the tree is the love of husband and wife, and the fruits of the tree are the ways your family influences (blesses) the world. Write your names in the trunk of the tree.



As a family, decide how you fulfill each of the four aspects of family life. Write your answers in each box. If you have children, on a separate piece of paper, have them color a picture to describe what you decided.

1. Developing a community of loving persons (*Examples: We say "I love you" to each other daily. We forgive one another. We take regular date nights as a couple. We visit our grandparents.*)
2. Serving life (*Examples: We are open to new children. We watch other families' kids so the parents can be together. We cook meals for new parents. We provide a moral education for our children.*)
3. Helping in society (*Examples: We share with those in need. Our home is a place of hospitality.*)
4. Sharing in the life and mission of the Church (*Examples: We pray as a family. We attend Mass and Reconciliation. Our home is a domestic Church. We tell others about our faith.*)

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### ***Handout B: The Vocation to Marriage***

“The *Catechism* teaches that Christ’s grace in the Sacrament of Marriage protects the essential purposes of marriage: the good of the couple and the generation and education of children. These purposes are protected and fostered by the permanence of the marriage bond and the mutual fidelity of spouses” (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 283).

*“By their marriage, the couple witnesses  
Christ’s spousal love for the Church”*  
(United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 281).

*“Through the liturgical celebration of marriage, husband and wife  
enter into a covenant which is also a Sacrament”*  
(United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 281).

### ***Family Discussion Questions***

What ingredients make a strong and holy marriage?

How do we give ourselves to others in love?

How do your differences in your marriage and family make the family stronger?

St. Francis de Sales asked couples to live their marriage faithfully, knowing we all have faults. When we hurt each other in marriage and family life, how do we forgive one another?