Lectio Divina for Newly Married Couples—Reconsidering Christian Families as Domestic Churches

A TREATISE

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Doctor of Ministry

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Married couples today, especially the newlyweds, face several challenges caused by both internal crises and external forces that threaten and weaken their relationships. The Catholic Church has always recognized these challenges and worked to defend marriage, seeing a significant link between healthy marriages and the society’s well-being. The Church has consistently called baptized married couples to live vibrant and holy marriages and to build their families as communities of discipleship—to form domestic churches—that foster love within and outside their boundaries. Most, however, are not familiar with this call probably due to the lack of ministry to newly married couples.

The current project was created with the primary purpose to strengthen marital relationships and build Catholic families as domestic churches through lectio divina. A five-session program of lectio divina and marital process designed for baptized, newly married couples had two intentions: (1) to reclaim the lost concept of domestic church and (2) familiarize them with the practice of lectio divina. Seventeen couples who have been married in the Roman Catholic Church within the past five years participated in the entire process. They met to learn, practice, and pray with lectio divina following three steps: breathing exercise, reading and meditating on a sacred text, and marital processing. They continued scriptural readings each day and shared their experiences. Dialogue and conversation during the last step was sustained by topics of contemplation, communication, reconciliation, sacramental life, commitment and mission, etc. To measure the health of their marriages and the impact of lectio divina on their
marriages and families, they took an online pre-program and post-program marriage assessment and survey. Data collected would evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

The goal of this program was to bring *lectio divina* into family life in order to build holy families or domestic churches by cultivating the awareness of the presence of God and God’s Word in married life. The results of the research confirmed that the practice of *lectio divina* and marital processing brought about the positive formation and transformation of marriage and family life. The participating couples testified their awareness of God’s presence more than ever before. Prayer and dialogue were key to this awareness and transformation.
This dissertation by Phi Cong Le fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in ministry approved by Raymond Studzinski, O.S.B., Ph.D., as Director, and by Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min., as Reader.

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DEDICATION

To
my parents,
who first taught me what it means to build domestic church through prayer,
my brothers and sisters,
who have supported me in living out the reality of domestic church,
and my fiancée,
who has encouraged and inspired me throughout the course of my studies,
and with whom I am looking forward to building our own domestic church.
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INTRODUCTION

Marriage as the permanent union between one man and one woman has many individual and social benefits. It benefits the individual person because it has been known to provide physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It is good for the society because it builds and strengthens human relationships within and beyond the home. It is where everyone learns the first lessons of personal and social responsibility. It is the greatest institution where faith is nurtured and virtues are taught. The family brought about by marriage thus has been understood as the foundational unit of society, the foundation that needs support and enhancement.

It is hard to deny the importance of family. Everyone comes to the world by way of the family. Each person owes his or her existence to the family. Everything is somehow related to the family. It is in this way that the family has been perceived not only as the basic foundation but also as the most important cell of the society. In this sense, the survival of the society depends on the health of the family. It is so important that the only-begotten Son of God chose to enter human history through the family. By the family, he redeemed the world.

Knowing the irreplaceable role of the family in the society, the Church highly values family and marriage by placing great emphasis on proper premarital preparations. Baptized married couples, particularly Catholic couples, are called to live vibrant and holy marriages and build their families as communities of discipleship. But in reality many of these families are suffering from internal crises and impacted by different external forces that threaten and weaken their inner unity and stability. These couples, especially newly married couples—those facing
many challenges and struggles in their transitions from single to married lives—have to make endless adjustments to meet the demands of life. Ironically, ministry to newly married couples seems rarely coordinated.

This project was created with this group of people in mind. Its purpose was to strengthen their marriages and challenge them to build their families as domestic churches through *lectio divina*. The Church in her early stage of development expressed her love and concern for the family by naming it “domestic church.” Unfortunately, this meaningful concept was forgotten or neglected for centuries until its retrieval by the Second Vatican Council. Since its rediscovery, the idea has slowly but steadily regained its favor. Catholic married couples are again called to form their families as domestic churches fostering love within and outside their boundaries. Most, however, are not familiar with this call, the call to make their families small churches. This idea needs revitalization and reintroduction.

A five-session program of *lectio divina* and marital process is designed for newly married Catholic couples with two intentions: (1) to reclaim the lost concept of domestic church and (2) familiarize them with the practice of *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina*, a contemplative approach to sacred writings, especially the Scriptures, is an ancient technique of slow and reverent reading of sacred texts, a way of prayer. It has been practiced in different areas of religious and monastic life but rarely used in married life, and those who practiced this prayer have witnessed positive effects in their spiritual lives. Thus, not only the Church’s officials but also professional marital therapists recommend it for marriage enrichments.\(^1\) The awareness of God’s presence in married

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\(^1\) Patrick J. McDonald and Claudette McDonald, marital and family therapists from Des Moines, Iowa, http://americamagazine.org/issue/689/article/word-between-us (accessed April 12, 2013); Bill Gaultiere and Kristi
life is key to building a domestic church, and the practice of *lectio divina* will support this process by cultivating the awareness of God’s Word dwelling within and among us.

The goal of this program is to bring *lectio divina* and its fruitful promise into family life to form holy families, domestic churches. Among many practices of the family that are central to its identity as domestic church, reading Scriptures as a way of prayer is of major importance. Christian families in general and Catholic families in particular need a life of prayer to cultivate awareness of God’s presence in their families in order to sustain their relationships with God and with one another as well as their responsibilities as churches. With the Catholic families as the primary focus of my approach, I organized a marital enrichment process in the context of married life using *lectio divina*.

In order to accomplish this goal, this treatise is structured as follows. Chapter one will explore the historical background of the concept of domestic church: its roots, development, and recovery. This chapter also investigates some reasons behind the loss of this concept through time and then proposes marital spirituality, an everyday spirituality, as a way to overcome this loss and bring back this valuable teaching: the domestic church. Chapter two will examine the theology, ecclesiology, and sacramentality of the domestic church by first discussing its Trinitarian, incarnational, and covenantal theology, and then describing its ecclesial and sacramental aspects with an emphasis on the community of discipleship and the liturgy of the world. Chapter three will focus on *lectio divina* and its formative and transformative power. The chapter will first investigate the historical testimonies of its impact on spiritual life and then

reflect on its spiritual formation in marriage and family. Chapter four will present the structure, implementation, and evaluation of the project. A final conclusion will identify some challenges and limitations of the project and sum up the results of its findings.
“The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”

Florence Bourg in the introduction to her book, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, wrote: “Domestic church presently lacks much of the richness of similar symbolic concepts, for Christians have not lived with it long enough or critically enough. The time is ripe to explore the nascent idea with full array of theological resources at our disposal.” In one of the areas Bourg suggested for further research, she saw that the notion of domestic church relatively remains unknown among average believers. She hoped that the idea will take hold not only among average believers but also pastors and scholars. She visualized that there are untapped opportunities for introducing this important teaching to them. Marriage preparation is one such opportunity, but for her “catechesis confined to a weekend retreat for engaged couples will be ‘too little, too late’.” There must be something more effective. She said: “If the idea of domestic church is to become ‘second nature’, it must be an integral component of preparation of parents.” She believed that in a generation or two, it will probably happen that Christians will consider their families and households as domestic churches where they operate and witness

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5 Ibid., 190.

6 Ibid.
their faith. “This would mean that Vatican II’s goal of overcoming the perceived dichotomy between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ life would be addressed at its root.”7 This project seeks to bring this very insightful vision into reality.

In this chapter, I will first explore the historical development of the concept “domestic church” in the Church. Second, I will examine several reasons behind the loss of the concept of domestic church in Catholicism for many decades. I will argue that the loss is partially due to misinterpretations of Scriptures and influence of the dualistic worldview. Third, I will propose that the everyday spirituality is a condition to bridge this dichotomy. Seeing marital spirituality as part of the everyday spirituality helps us to appreciate the sacredness in the mundane of our daily life where we build domestic churches.

1. Historical Background

The term “domestic church” has lately been used in many current magisterial documents to refer to a Christian family as the domestic church.8 The notion of domestic church finds its way back into many documents of the Church since the Second Vatican Council. In Vatican II’s Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) #11, when speaking about the sacrament of Matrimony, the Council says:

From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church.9

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7 Ibid., 182.
8 Alternate expressions of the Latin original “ecclesia domestica” are “church of the home,” “house church,” or “little church”.
So, by virtue of their baptism Christians become children of God and by virtue of marriage Christian families become domestic churches. It is safe to say that a Christian family is a domestic church, where the Church is first formed and developed through the proclamation of the faith by the parents.

Vatican II marks the revitalization of the concept of domestic church. It is the result of the persistent efforts of Bishop Pietro Fiordelli of Prato, Italy. When he first proposed his opinion on Christian marriage and family to the Council, he was interrupted by the presiding Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht, who objected and said that the topic “did not seem germane to the discussion at hand.” Bishop Fiordelli eventually yielded the floor but did not stop his campaign for the idea, which the Church at Vatican II was not ready to embrace. Perhaps, that is why the expression “domestic church” is found in only one particular section in one of the many documents of Vatican II. The experience of Bishop Fiordelli reveals the challenge of introducing this new thinking to people about Christian families as ecclesial communities.

Immediately following Vatican II, even though the concept of domestic church had been introduced, it remained relatively uncommon. It appeared once in Pope Paul VI’s 1975 exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi: “The family has well deserved the beautiful name of ‘domestic church.’”

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11 Bourg, “Domestic Church,” 186.
12 Lumen Gentium, no. 11.
Church.”¹³ It was mentioned in John Paul II’s *Catechesi Tradendae* in 1979: “‘The church of the home’ remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis.”¹⁴ Other than these noticeable occurrences, there are just a few other works devoted to the subject of domestic church; most theologians and pastoral authors during this time busied themselves with other concerns.¹⁵

The 1980s marked a turning point in the theological revival of domestic church.¹⁶ In 1980, the Catholic Bishops opened a Synod devoted to the theme of family, followed by the release of John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* in 1981.¹⁷ In America, the U.S. bishops explored the idea of domestic church in *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* in 1988 and in *Follow the Way of Love* in 1994.¹⁸ The term also appeared a few times in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹⁹ Lately, Pope Benedict XVI has also made comments on domestic church in his speeches and general audience remarks.²⁰

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¹⁶ Ibid.
The root of this concept originated in the early Church and in the Jewish tradition.\textsuperscript{21} This origin could be seen in the Pauline Epistles, which provide evidence that early communities of Christians identified themselves with particular households. For example, Paul greeted “the church” gathering at Prisca and Aquila’s house: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house” (Rom 16:3-5, NAB).\textsuperscript{22} In another place, Paul recognized the household of Stephanas and their service, and together with “the churches of Asia” and the church at Aquila and Prisca’s house, he sent his greetings to them (1 Cor 16:15-19).\textsuperscript{23} These early Christian communities formed by Paul gathered in their homes to read the Sacred Scriptures and break the bread because they did not have their own places of worship.\textsuperscript{24} Their homes became “Church,” until the birth of Christian worship buildings in the third century, sometimes in 314 A.D., a year after the Edict of Milan.\textsuperscript{25} As more worship buildings like basilicas were built, homes ceased to function as formal places of worship for early Christian assembly. Yet, the idea that the Christian family is actually a domestic church


\textsuperscript{22}All scriptural references herein are taken from The New American Bible (NAB).

\textsuperscript{23}Other passages that speak of the house church include: Colossians 4:15; 2 Timothy 4:19; Philemon 1-2.

\textsuperscript{24}Pope Benedict XVI in his address to general audience on February 7, 2007 speaking about Prisca and Aquila writes: “Hence, we come to know the most important role that this couple played in the environment of the primitive Church: that of welcoming in their own house the group of local Christians when they gathered to listen to the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist. It is exactly this type of gathering that in Greek is called ‘ekklesia’ - the Latin word is ‘ecclesia’, the Italian ‘chiesa’ - which means convocation, assembly, gathering. In the house of Aquila and Priscilla, therefore, the Church gathered, the convocation of Christ, which celebrates here the Sacred Mysteries. Thus, we can see the very birth of the reality of the Church in the homes of believers.”

\textsuperscript{25}Cahill, \textit{Family}, 36.
did not die out because according to Cahill in her book, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, it did not emerge directly from the house churches of the first Christians.\(^\text{26}\)

The notion of domestic church truly prevailed in the patristic period, a period which extends from about the second to the eighth century. Even though early Christians already had their own places of worships, Church fathers\(^\text{27}\) have never stopped encouraging believers to regulate their households as churches. In a homily on Ephesians, for example, John Chrysostom encouraged Christian spouses to become good husbands and wives by asking them to regulate their households properly, because “the household is a little church.”\(^\text{28}\) In a homily on the book of Acts, Chrysostom insisted on making “the house be a Church, consisting of men and women….”\(^\text{29}\) Indeed, the metaphor of the family as a domestic church that has undergone a revival since The Second Vatican Council owes its appearance in the early tradition to Chrysostom.

Augustine as a bishop then asked Christian heads of households to exercise their roles similar to his own: “Take my place in your families. Everyone who is head of a house must exercise the episcopal office and see to the faith of his people…. Take care with all watchfulness for the salvation of the members of the household entrusted to you.”\(^\text{30}\) Despite the influence of a generally deprecatory view of sex and marriage during their time, many patristic figures

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{27}\) See Cahill, *Family*, 48-60; Bourg, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 10-11.


perceived the family as a church: where the revelation of the love between Christ and the Church fulfills, where the relational intimacy of the Holy Trinity reveals, and where the promise of Christ’s presence among two or three gathered together in his name becomes real.

Since the patristic period, the notion of domestic church had gone unnoticed or undeveloped in Roman Catholic theology until it found its way back into Vatican II. However, titles like “little church,” or “seminary of the church,” have enjoyed favor among some Protestants. For example, Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), an American Congregational minister and theologian, considered a Christian family as a little church, the most effective medium of contact with God.31 Likewise, John Calvin (1509-1564), well-known for his belief in theocracy, was confident that a family united in true worship of God constitutes the basic unit of church and commonwealth.32

Like Calvin, the Puritans see the family as a cell of the church and thus make the family a vital and indispensable center of religious training. They call the family “a seminary of the church and the commonwealth,” and they see the indispensable benefit of bringing “the church of God” into the households and nourishing it in the families.33 So, even though the idea of domestic church has seemed to disappear in the Catholic Church since the patristic period, it finds its life in the Protestant circles. The remaining question is: Why had the idea of domestic church been forgotten for a long period of time in the Roman Catholic theology?

31 Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 11.
32 John Calvin, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, cited in Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 11; and in Cahill, Family, 71.
33 Cahill, Family, 72.
2. A Forgotten Concept

As we have seen, the house churches in the early formation of Christianity diminished when more church buildings appeared after Constantine legalized religions, and Christianity became the official religion of the state. But this did not stop people from gathering at their homes for worship. In fact, church fathers encouraged them to continue to make their homes churches. After the patristic period, the notion of domestic church had gone into oblivion in the Western church, and would not be recovered until Vatican II. There are several possible reasons.

Jesus and Family

One of the reasons for this lack of emphasis on marriage and family life is the misreading and misinterpretation of the gospels. Jesus seems to indicate that family bonds are incompatible with discipleship. His sayings seem to overthrow cultural norms: “self-identification with one’s family, loyalty to the family above all else, strict hierarchy within the family and antagonism, competition, or reciprocal favoritism among families.” For instance, in the one scene mentioned where Jesus is interacting with his parents, there is little domestic tranquility. Jesus after a visit to the temple with his parents does not go home. After a day of travel his parents discover that he is missing. When they find him in the temple sitting among religious elders and pursuing theological conversation, he is mildly reprimanded by his mother, “Son, why have you done this to us?” (Lk 2: 48). In response, Jesus does not say that he is sorry that his parents worried so much. Instead, he replies, “Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2: 49). The family reactions are short-circuited by the assertion

34 Ibid., 29.
that God’s work takes precedence over anything. In other words, the gospel writers were trying to assert that domestic life must give way to the kingdom and its preparation.

Mark portrays a scene where his relatives disbelieved and regarded him as out of his mind (Mk 3:21), trying to take him home, “an effort on behalf of his safety and family honor.”35 When informed of the arrival of his mother, brothers, and sisters, he responded by showing this repudiation toward his family’s responsibility for him and his family ties: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mk 3:31-35). In the same way of distancing Jesus from his familial origins, Luke illustrates how Jesus disallowed praise for his own mother and acknowledged that the attentiveness to God’s word is more important than biological relationship to him: “Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it” (Lk 11:27-28).

Jesus apparently challenged family loyalties and ties by seeming to demand that family relations be completely repudiated and abandoned: “If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, indeed his very self, he cannot be my follower” (Lk 14:26). In response to Peter’s desire for reward, Jesus said, “I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive [back] an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come” (Mk 10:28-30; Mt 19:27-29; Lk 18: 28-30). Was it the intention of the message to attack the family? No, in a sense family was not the issue. Rather, the intent was to emphasize that the work of God must take precedence over everything in life including something as important as family.

35 Ibid.
Cahill suggests a more appropriate way to understand these passages:

These pronouncements are baffling to those of us who see care for parents and children and loyalty to our spouses as important moral duties. Their meaning comes into focus in the context of the first-century patriarchal family, where familial forms of faithfulness serve as demarcators of social approbation and status and as structures through which material and social well-being is assured for some and denied to others. Loyalty to one’s own group and dedication to the status of that group over all others and at the expense of whoever stands in its way are incompatible with a life of mercy, service, and compassion for the neighbor in need or for the social outcasts and the poor existing on the margins of society. Family loyalty certainly conflicts with mercy to competitors for prestige or goods with whom one has established longstanding enmity.  

The only reason that Jesus claimed as much is because nothing can replace God, the God of mercy, love, and compassion. Nothing, even the family bond, is more important than the kingdom of God, the reign of service, peace, and justice. Jesus by his life, his experience, and his teaching shows the importance of family where children first learn the love of mercy, service, and compassion.

Celibacy as a Higher Vocation

Misinterpreting Jesus’ teaching of abandoning one’s family gives rise to the long lasting belief that celibacy is a higher call to perfection, the only true vocation. Marriage on the other hand is not only seen as lesser call but not even considered as a vocation. Many have taken this perception seriously with no question because the gospels say so. This is also seen in misreading and misinterpreting the Pauline letters. For example, in his advice to the Corinthians, Paul insisted: “The unmarried man is busy with the Lord’s affairs, concerned with pleasing the Lord; but the married man is busy with the world’s demands and occupied with pleasing his wife” (1 Cor 7:32-33). Paul saw that the husband and wife relationship interferes with the search for God.

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36 Cahill, *Family*, 29.
He thus advised that the spouses who wish to find God can do so more effectively by separating from each other and looking for God in their private or communal prayer. They could find God better if they escaped from the demands of the daily life because there is no direct connection between the household chores and the search for God. He insisted that “a man is better off having no relations to a woman” (1 Cor 7:1). A man is divided if he is preoccupied with his wife and tries to do God’s work at the same time.

Paul presented his Christian ideal by challenging others to be like him. That is, he invited those who heard his message to the celibate life. Those who were not married should remain unmarried if possible. For those already married Paul advised them to remain together since they had made a commitment and they should honor it. The main concern of the early Christians was to prepare for God’s kingdom to come, so all others, including marriage and family life, must be subordinate. All of these should be interpreted in the context of the time. Where there is reference to marriage and family, the passages usually are attempting to drive home the all-important message of preparing for the kingdom of God, which the early Christians expected to be established within their lifetime.

Marriage and Dualism

Early Christians’ expectation that the kingdom of God would be established during their lifetime failed since the parousia, the second coming of Jesus, did not occur. They postponed this hope to a farther future and began the work of building an expanding institutional Church. During the patristic period, which gets its name from the male figures who led the Church in the early years, the institutional Church had already begun to assert itself. The order necessary for
carrying out the demands of conventional life required certain cohesion. The type of cohesion most understood in a patriarchal society was obedience to the males who were in charge of the community. “This inherent need for change,” as Martin points out, “must be understood in any attempt to grasp the shifts that have taken place in Christian thinking about marriage.”

Since the second coming was not imminent, members of the early Christian community faced the need to make adjustments to the daily life around them. They struggled with the question of how to live their lives in service of God. With the influence of many movements of the day that promoted the abandonment of the senses and glorified the commencement of the spirit, Christians found themselves eventually becoming attracted to these movements. This dualistic worldview came from groups such as the Stoics, the Gnostics, and the Manicheans who argued that “the pleasures of the world should be either severely controlled or enthusiastically spurned.” They held this conviction: earth is against heaven, the spirit better than the material, and religious life holier than married life. The tendency to renounce the world and its pleasures led some Christians to the desert with an effort to deprive the senses as much as possible. Christianity at this time became locked in a dualism which saw the spirit and the body at odds, and thus developed its style of life and its reflection in this dualistic setting. It is not difficult to understand how the eremitic lifestyle was considered the ideal of Christian living. It is also not difficult to understand how even the celibates living in the midst of the local church were honored.

38 Ibid. 60.
Given this dualism, the early leaders of the church addressed the married people in the community with harsh terms. For example, Origen, a leader of the famous theological school at Alexandria in present day Egypt, felt that souls pre-existed and were imprisoned in the body. Virginity, thus, was heavily favored for those who felt capable of the call. Marriage was usually presented as a concession to human weakness that allows the race to continue. Christian thinkers at this time had a difficult time seeing marriage as part of God’s plan originally because they were so upset with the way the married state thrust people into the physical world. Marriage for them must have been at best a backup plan that resulted after the fall, or if it was a part of God’s original plan it was necessary only for the purpose of procreation.39

The medieval church maintained the dualistic worldview that it inherited from the patristic period.40 As a result, it saw the celibate life as the way of perfection. A common medieval understanding of vocation as a calling to the priesthood or religious life perceived as higher life than the mediocre life of a lay person. The married life was a lower calling which was in fact extended to the majority of the Church. Marriage was necessary to continue the race, but one was called to continence and self-control. Any deliberate enjoyment of the sexual pleasures was seen as a source of sin. To be close to God meant to live a contemplative life apart from the busy society and the mundane activities of everyday life.

Before the close of the middle ages, however, marriage was accepted as one of the seven sacraments and became a liturgical ceremony in the Church.41 Even when marriage was well received, and Christians realized its significance in their lives, they were little prepared and thus

39 Ibid., 60-70.
40 Ibid., 72-80.
41 Ibid., 81-89.
not ready to embrace the domestic life as their calling within the Christian vocation. Couched in the dualism of the day, marriage was still seen as a lower way of Christian life when compared to the celibate calling. This mentality continued its existence in the Roman Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council, which opened the door for the spirit of aggiornamento in the Church.  

The three reasons discussed above—the misinterpretation of Jesus’ downplay of family, the misperception of celibacy as a higher call, and the penetration of dualistic views—probably contribute to the loss of the idea of domestic church. While the force of these factors has not been as powerful in the modern day, their roots however have not been completely eradicated. The Christian way of life is still influenced and impacted by these worldviews: clergy versus laity, official religion versus individual spirituality, and so on. The emergence of spirituality of everyday life has been received as a way to overcome this unhealthy problem.

Problem of Dualism

Today, many married Christians, especially Catholics, still fail to recognize the married life as a fundamental context for living out Christian discipleship. Those who choose to marry still see themselves as second-class citizens. The principal road to sanctity, for them, is exclusively for the priestly and religious vocations. Marriage and family are occupied with the many distractions of ordinary life, which are too sinful for God’s dwelling. Celibate life is still perceived as a higher call to holy and perfect life. Holiness, for them, is possible only by imitating the spirituality of the priests and religious. The conviction that holiness could be found

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42 Lumen Gentium, no. 41.
in the circumstances of marriage and family life itself seems unreal.\textsuperscript{44} This view of marriage and family becomes “distorted when secular and sacred aspects of marriage become separated and dichotomized.”\textsuperscript{45}

Pope John Paul II in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, shows his deep concern about “two temptations” rooted in dualism which for him lay people have not always known how to avoid: “the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life.”\textsuperscript{46} In other words, some are very active in the Church but not involved in making the world outside of the Church like their family a better place, while others go to Church but not actually living the Gospel in everyday situations. This dualistic mentality originated in the Greek world presents a block to the development of theology and spirituality of the family and is the main cause of most of our division between faith and life.\textsuperscript{47}

Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit priest and a scientist, in his little book, \textit{The Divine Milieu}, speaks a prophetic voice to today’s world. He observes that Christians tend to respond to dualism in three common ways: First, those who are so religious reject the worldly or earthly things all together; second, those who reject religions try to live what they consider

complete human life with no regard for spirituality; and third, those who do not integrate the two and become compartmentalized live “a double life,” neither belonging to God nor to things.\textsuperscript{48} Each solution is a “danger” and “for various reasons, all three of these solutions are to be feared.”\textsuperscript{49} These dualistic ways of dealing with Christian life should be reexamined under a new light of spirituality.

3. Everyday Spirituality

The Church for centuries has fought a tough battle against the danger posed by dualism, the danger that silently poisons the spiritual life of the home. People like Teilhard de Chardin who foresaw this threat have sought to teach how “to see God everywhere, to see him in all that is most hidden, most solid, and most ultimate in the world.”\textsuperscript{50} Such teaching that human existence and the universe are full of God, nonetheless, has met an obstacle, the problem of spiritual dualism.\textsuperscript{51} A recommended solution to this problem is the everyday spirituality—the integration of spiritual life and daily life together. There is a need for this integration: “to move beyond the classical dichotomy between the secular and the sacred.”\textsuperscript{52} Only through integration of all facets of our being can we become whole people. Marital spirituality situated in the daily activities of the family finds its home in the spirituality of everyday life.

Everyday spirituality is not something we can do once and for all. It is rather an ongoing experience of the sacred in daily life. That is why it is often called spiritual journey: “A true spiritual journey is not lived vicariously, but only by getting on the road ourselves and testing the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 10-14.
\textsuperscript{52} Roberts, \textit{Christian Marriage and Family}, 9.
terrain." It requires a certain kind of attention to and awareness of the ways in which God is present in our daily lives. It is what we have to do with our desire. Its purpose is to find God in all of life. To accomplish this purpose, we need to erase from our memory the dualistic mentality and replace it with a new “horizon”: “the vision of a spirituality that is grounded in the very fabric of daily existence.”

In this vision, everyday spirituality finds its theological roots in the Trinitarian theology of creation, incarnation, and Spirit. God created the world along with humans. The God who created the world entered the very condition of human living through Christ. Now, that same God is among and within us through the Spirit. Creation is seen as a process moving from alpha to omega. In this very sense, it is erroneous to imagine that creation was finished. Rather, “it continues still more magnificently, and at the highest levels of the world.” In other words, the initial creative act extends itself in endless ways through space and time. “The very sending of the Word into history to take on flesh and share with us all the joys and sorrows of being human is an incredible act of God’s creative and imaginative power.”

God being both transcendent and imminent is present in and through the universe. God is sacramentally veiled in the matter of the world and our actions, and yet “God is inexhaustibly attainable in the totality of our action.” We cannot be negative about the material world if perceiving things this way: God is incarnate in the world through Christ so that the world can

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53 Dryer, Earth Crammed with Heaven, 12.
55 Dryer, Earth Crammed with Heaven, 50.
56 Ibid., 53-67.
57 Ibid., 25.
58 Ibid., 58.
59 Teilhard, Divine Milieu, 27.
become the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ is the way all things come back to God. In the incarnation, all of God’s creation is charged with sanctification by the work of the Father sending the Son, who in turn gives us the gift of the Spirit. If all are sanctified, then so is our family. In this sense, our family is holy and has dignity, not because we on our own make it holy but because the Holy Spirit dwelling among and within us sanctifies it. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, gives this meaning to our human existence through his life, death, and resurrection.

As Jesus lived, suffered, and died with the mission of being in union with his Father, we must live our lives in a spirit of being closer to God. It is the mission of all Christians. Spirituality of marriage and family must have the Triune God as the center of all of life, as God was the center of Jesus’ life on earth. It works through our participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Family becomes a way to follow Christ in his redemptive suffering. The call to holiness is thus the call to “participate in the very life of God.”60 Through marriage and family, we participate in the creative activities of the Triune God and the redemptive work of Christ.

This responsibility is part of our call to holiness and the development of spirituality of everyday life grows out of it. If God is the source of holiness and being holy means being close to God, then we can respond to it through our vocations because God can be experienced in all of life. Holiness, as Dryer points out, is judged, “not by office, sex or prosperity,” but by the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, justice, peace, joy, patience—“fruits that are present in many lives, irrespective of lifestyle, occupation or role in the church.”61 In this sense, the dichotomy of

60 Dryer, Earth Crammed with Heaven, 3.
61 Ibid., 17.
religious existence and ordinary daily existence makes no sense since the Spirit permeates everything.\textsuperscript{62} This spirituality challenges us to see God in every moment of our lives. It also undermines the problem of dualism which leads to compartmentalizing life.

Conclusion

The examination of dualism and its problem helps us understand why for centuries married Christians do not see their marriage and family as a basic way to holiness. The exploration of the history of the concept of domestic church where its members can become holy reveals its existence in the early Church. This important concept, however, had been lost since the end of patristic period and would not be recovered until Vatican II. The reasons for this loss are found in the misinterpretation of Jesus’ messages, the mispresentation of celibacy as a higher call, and the penetration of dualistic worldviews. The way to undermine dualism is to reconsider the everyday spirituality on which the spirituality of the home is grounded. With this background, we now can study the theology and ecclesiology of the Christian family and discuss the sacramentality of domestic church.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 22.
CHAPTER 2: THEOLOGY, ECCLESIOLOGY, and SACRAMENTALITY of DOMESTIC CHURCH

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“The family is, so to speak, the domestic church.” *Lumen Gentium* (#11)

The concept of “domestic church,” as pointed out by Joseph Atkinson in his recent article, was reintroduced into a document of the Second Vatican Council with “little or no explanation” and with “no developed theological grounding.”63 If Atkinson is correct, then what is the foundation for theology of the Christian family as domestic church? In this chapter, I will first consider the theology of the Christian family. In light of the everyday spirituality, and thus marital spirituality, I will propose that the theology of domestic church should have its foundation on the Trinitarian, covenantal, and incarnational theology. Viewing the family as a relational and communal entity, I treat this theology through the concept of covenant in Old Testament and New Testament. I will take a close look at how the old covenant is transferred to Jesus, the New Covenant, and how his own family and his expanded family, the Church, become new covenantal entities. I will discuss how the Christian family as school of discipleship reflects this very ecclesial nature of the Church. Finally, I will examine the sacramentality of domestic church through the liturgy of the world.

63 Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 592.
4. Theology and Ecclesiology of Domestic Church

There is a good reason for seeking a theological foundation of the Christian family in the Trinitarian, covenantal, and incarnational theology. God is Triune, a loving communal relationship among Father, Son, and Spirit. This is what the author of 1 John acclaims: “God is love” (4:8). This divine love gives birth to the covenant first set with Abraham and his family. Out of this love, Jesus, the Son of God, enters the human condition: God so loved the world that he sent his only Son (Jn 3:16). The Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ, is the new covenant set anew our relationship with God. This incarnation is made possible through a family, the family of Nazareth. This love demands our response which becomes the conditions of discipleship.

Covenant

Covenant is one of the major themes in the Old Testament that illustrates Israel’s “sacred history”—an account of the Hebrew people’s ongoing relationship with their God, Yahweh. This covenant is any form of binding agreement, a solemn contract or a special alliance, between Yahweh and Israel. “To covenant is to consent and to promise, so that both parties, equal or unequal in other respects, are mutually committed to one another solemnly and radically.” In this mutually contractual relationship, God promises to become Israel’s protector and Israel in return is required to keep this covenant.

Two models of covenant emerge in the Old Testament. The first called the Mosaic or Sinaiic covenant, a conditional covenant, is associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai. This

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covenant reflects the northern Mosaic traditions which stress the judgment of Yahweh and the need for repentance. The second is called the Davidic or Abrahamic covenant, an unconditional covenant, given to Abraham and then made new with David. It reflects the southern traditions of Judah and the works of all post-exilic prophets who appeared to proclaim hope, forgiveness, and restoration, reassuring the people of Yahweh’s perpetual faithfulness.66 The latter is generally and traditionally understood as the older covenant God made with the people of Israel through Abraham and his family. The family of Abraham thus becomes the first “carrier”67 of the covenant in the history of salvation.

The earliest historical existence of the Hebrew people started with the emergence of Abram (Abraham) and his family. Nonetheless, the real history of Israel as a people collectively or a nation was first marked by the exodus.68 Their experience of being free from Egypt and then being tested in the wilderness matured their relationship with Yahweh and prepared them to receive the covenant at Mount Sinai. “There are now two focal points: a single God and a single people bound together for better or for worse.”69 Mosaic covenant God made with his people collectively and Abrahamic covenant God specifically promised to Abraham’s family are not separately exclusive but rather singly complementary.

In Exodus 19:3-6, God clearly commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that if they kept God’s covenant, they would be God’s “special possession,” “a holy nation.” Obviously, there

67 This term is used by Joseph Atkinson in his article “Family as Domestic Church.”
68 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 155. The history of Israel as individual clans or persons had already begun before the exodus, but Israel as a nation did not exist until after the exodus.
69 Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, 155.
was a condition in this binding agreement: God would love and protect them and they must be obedient to God. Being obedient means keeping God’s commandments, the laws Moses received on Mount Sinai. This Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant was an ever-loving bond between God and Israel. God gave them his commandments to live by and to provide order and structure for the new-formed nation. Thus, the Israelites did not see these laws as burdens but as loving guidance. According to Boadt, “Covenant theology not only applies to the moment on Mt. Sinai, it provides the framework for understanding God’s earlier promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”\(^7\) That is, this covenant undergirds the understanding of Abrahamic (the ancestral and tribal origins and traditions) or Davidic (the national identity and history) covenant.

The Old Testament tells stories of how God called Israel’s ancestors (patriarchs and matriarchs) into a covenant relationship with God. God first called Abraham to leave his home to a foreign land which remained completely unknown to him (Gen 12:1-3). God promised to make him father of all nations and his descendants would be like stars in the sky at the time he was old and had no children (Gen 15:5). God finally renewed the covenant by giving him a son, Isaac (Gen 26); but then God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Despite all of these trials, Abraham answered God’s call with an absolute faith that pleased God and thus God brought His promise to fulfillment. Jacob, Isaac’s son, on the other hand, was a perfect trickster for his skillful trickery. When he was wrestling with God, however, he became anew, and his name was changed to Israel (Gen 32:23-33). Despite Jacob’s corruption and imperfection, God again renewed with Jacob the covenant promised to Abraham (Gen 28).

\(^7\) Ibid., 174.
These characteristics are important for the later Israelites because they were also struggling to follow God, to believe in God. There were obstacles and trials like those Abraham and Jacob were facing. But obstacles were not there to harm or impede them, rather they were there as challenges for them to get better or to trust God more. And there was a hope that God would fulfill His promise as He did for their ancestors. As humans, they were imperfect like their ancestors. God, however, worked with their imperfection like God did with Jacob. “The patriarchal stories of Abraham were preserved by the Jews themselves as a true promise and prelude to the deeper covenant and promise of Mount Sinai, and can be read in no other way, certainly not as in opposition to Moses.”71

Like the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant shares almost the same divine promises. As described in 2 Samuel 7, God’s promises to David were significant for the establishment of the monarchy. God would make him famous and would fix a place for his people that no enemies would disturb them (9-11). God would establish a “house” for him and his “house” and his kingdom would endure forever (11b and 16). His heir would make his kingdom firm (12). His heir first pointed to Solomon, his son, but later with the fall of Jerusalem and the deposition of the Davidic dynasty, this promise was reinterpreted that there would always be a descendant from David ruling from his throne. This developed into Jewish hopes for a messiah, and in the New Testament, Jesus was presented as the one who will inherit the throne of David. Thus, “David became the image of the hoped-for ideal king who would come to lead Jews not only politically, but morally as well.”72 The focal point is: God is always present and

71 Ibid., 143.
72 Gnuse, Jewish Roots of Christian Faith, 114.
always blesses His people generously and it is very important to keep the covenant in order to receive blessings.

The turning point in the Jewish people’s history really occurs when the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was lost into the hands of the Babylonians. Jerusalem was destroyed and its leading citizens sent into exile. About this time, Jeremiah uttered the great oracle of the “New Covenant” (31:31-34). Babylon, according to Jeremiah, was Yahweh’s tool to punish Judah for their many sins. He stresses that Yahweh employs Babylon as the divinely appointed instrument of punishment against the covenant-breaking Judah. Ezekiel following the words of Jeremiah about a new covenant written on the heart understood the new covenant “to be written on the hearts of the people in its interior-ness.”\textsuperscript{73} Ezekiel stressed following the spirit of the covenant, and saw importance in the “roles of the sabbath as a day of rest, reflective meditation on the covenant, personal uprightness, purity, and holiness.”\textsuperscript{74} It was no longer enough to be born Israelites; now one needed to decide to live according to God’s law.

This understanding of covenant points to several important points. God shows His love for all kinds of people regardless of their imperfection. God wants a relationship with humans and works with their weakness and imperfection. People such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David are imperfect, but they have faith and they trust God, and God works with them. God does not only keep his promises to individuals but also to their descendants, their families. When people fail to be faithful to the covenant, God sends his representatives, the prophets, to renew and remind them of the covenant. There is always hope because God is eternally faithful.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 396-397.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 397.
and God’s covenant is ever new. God is always present and involved with human affairs and God continually acts in human history to show God’s covenant love through time.

Jesus and His Family as Carrier of the New Covenant

In the Old Testament, the word covenant is used to express the special relationship between God and the people of Israel. It is rooted in mutual and freely made promises. The laws and worship practices in the Old Testament were signs of this special relationship. In the New Testament, this great covenant is neither forgotten nor abandoned but rather transferred to being rooted in Jesus.75 During the Last Supper, Jesus establishes a new covenant, one sealed with his blood and his very life. Through the paschal mystery, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the covenant is established and the old covenant is fulfilled.

The condition of the covenant required in the Old Testament is not different from the New. The two commandments which “the whole law and the prophets depend on” (Mat 22:40) come from the Hebrew Scriptures. The first is our responsibility with God: “you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Dt 6:5). The second is our responsibility with the covenanted people: “You shall love your neighbors as yourself” (Lv 19:18). When tested by a scholar of the law about the greatest commandment, Jesus has no hesitation to cite these two (Mk 12:28-34; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28). In fact, Jesus comes to fulfill them (Mk 1:15; Mat 5:17).

At the moment Jesus was born, the time of fulfillment had been reached: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption” (Gal 4:4). The savior did not just appear

75 Lawler, Marriage and the Catholic Church, 202.
but was in fact born by a woman. He thus entered into every normal process of human life. His birth became a ransom for many who were “enslaved under the elemental powers of the world” (Gal 4:3). To become an heir to the promises made to Abraham, performance of the law is not required, but rather faith in Jesus Christ. The amazing truth is: God in order to save the world entered into a human family.

Born into a family that practiced their faith, Jesus was certainly growing up in a faith-nurtured environment. Chapter two of Luke’s gospel tells us an incident when his parents following the Law of Moses went to Jerusalem to present him and offer the sacrifice in the temple. It was in this story we learn that Jesus’ family like any family experienced the ordeal of suffering. According to the words of Simeon, a righteous and devout man, Mary being the mother of Christ does not prevent her from suffering. Together with Joseph, her spouse, she faced tough moments in raising Jesus. Her love of Christ causes her heart to be pierced. It was in this family Jesus grew strong and filled with wisdom.

Jesus’ family as we now call it, the holy family, does have issues and struggles. This family from the beginning has endured out of wedlock pregnancy and attempt of divorce (Lk 1:26-38; Mt 1:18-25). Jesus was indeed born in a poor homeless immigrant family. His parents, Mary and Joseph, were literally on the street, desperately searching for a place at the momentous birth of their first born son (Lk 2:7). They actually lived as immigrants in Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). It is in this very passage we see how Joseph exercised his role of a father who serves, leads, and protects his family during times of threat and persecution. Like any parents, they struggled with the hardship of parenting. A key example again is an episode in the temple when they were
confronted by the adolescent Jesus after two days looking for him “with great anxiety”: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49).

This shows the very human side of the holy family with whom we, especially those with children, can certainly identify. The gospels do not tell much more about this family, but we can estimate with no doubt that at the end of Jesus’ life, they surely faced criticism and persecution when Jesus was accused as a criminal. These are the deep sorrows and sufferings.

The fact is we can be sure that being the holy family does not mean that it has no moments of conflict and crisis as all families do. We can also be sure that despite challenges they always remained faithful to God and the covenant. Of course, we must be cautious not to speak in “glowing romantic terms of the Holy Family.” But we are confident that God is always present in their family. By entering and living in a family, Jesus shows the significance of the family. He reveals the reality of being family that consists of both joys and sorrows. By living through the family condition, he sanctifies the family and makes it holy like God chose the people of Israel and sanctified them.

While Luke and Matthew give us the historical details of the family life of the Lord, John, the beloved disciple, reveals Jesus’ inner identity. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us (Jn 1). Here we see both the unity between the divine realm, the Word, and the material realm, his Body. On one level, this is unimaginable; and yet it is true. It points to the sacramental dimension of matter. Ordinary things can carry infinite meaning. Hidden within the ordinary home life of Nazareth was the Second Person of the Trinity. Hidden beneath the

76 Ibid., 198.
ordinary appearances of our ordinary life dwell those who are redeemed and in the process of being made holy and who are destined forever to live with God.

The Church as Jesus’ Extended Family

We should not be too naïve to admit that Jesus in his teaching did make some radical claims against the family as discussed before. Recent studies have investigated the socio-cultural contexts of this particular teaching of Jesus and the results show that there are some reasons behind this. Rubio, for example, insists: “When Jesus asks his followers to leave family behind, he is talking about a particular kind of family: the patriarchal family in which men held nearly absolute power over women.” This feminine perspective supports the notion that Jesus challenged the patriarchal system of family which has women in subordinate roles (Eph 5). When examining the synoptic gospels, Thatcher concludes: “The synoptic Gospels clearly and repeatedly depict Jesus as relativizing the kinship group, and emphasizing the priority of the family of God over the family of kin.” Michael Lawler shares the same intuition that “a move away from this family to another surrogate family in which kin is created not by blood but by belief in and loyalty to the God preached by Jesus. The true Holy Family … is not Jesus’ biological family but the surrogate, fictive-kin family composed of believers loyal to God.” A consistent message is a challenge to put God first. The true meaning of being family now is no longer confined in one particular structure of family, the biological family, but rather in the following of Jesus. “In the earliest tradition that following of Jesus is called discipleship and the

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77 See Chapter 1, section 1.
80 Lawler, Marriage and the Catholic Church, 199.
gathering of disciples is called *ekklesia*, the Church of God (1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5, 15).”

Before going further into the nature of church, let us examine what it means to be Jesus’ disciples and whether marriage and family life is suitable for discipleship.

**Discipleship**

Out of the four gospels, Mark, considered the first gospel written, portrays the clearest picture of true discipleship. If we study carefully the literary structure of this gospel, we learn that the three times Mark paints the image of Jesus as the suffering Messiah are the three times he strives to speak to his community about the true conditions of discipleship. The first is seen in Mark 8:34-38 when Jesus teaches them about true conditions of discipleship. The second occurs on their way to Capernaum (9:33-37), and the third takes place on their way up to Jerusalem (10:35-45).

The Jesus that Mark dares his suffering community to embrace is the suffering Messiah—the Son of Man. In 8:31-33, after Jesus reveals more about himself as the Son of Man, who must undergo suffering and death and rise again, he goes on to clarify the true nature of discipleship by challenging his disciples to see discipleship as a total commitment to himself (8:34-38). To be Jesus’ disciples is to deny oneself and accept one’s cross, even to the point of sacrificing one’s life. Life with mere worldly gain and denial of Jesus leads to destruction, but life living in loyalty to Jesus and “the gospel” receives its fullness. To follow Jesus is to make a life choice: saving one’s life for oneself or losing one’s life for God (8:35; see Jn 12:25). The decision of losing one’s life or saving it is the reality that Mark and his excruciated community

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81 Ibid., 201.
had to choose in their time.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, there is a great cost of discipleship for “this faithless and sinful generation” (8:38; Mt 10:33; Lk 12:8).

In the second prediction of the Passion, Jesus again tells them what will happen to him but they do not understand (9:30-32). Following this prediction is the debate among the disciples to determine who is the greatest in the kingdom. They still do not see what Jesus tries to show them because they get caught up in the false hopes of power and glory. Jesus thus guides them to the nature of discipleship—the servanthood: “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all” (9:35; Mt 20:27). Clearly, to be Jesus’ disciples means to be “the servant of all.” Following him means living a life of service. The way to carry out this service mission, as Jesus demonstrated to his disciples with a child, is to receive every little one who is insignificant in the community like receiving Jesus himself (9:37; Mt 10:40, 18:5; Jn 13:20).

In the third prediction, Jesus once more time reveals to his disciples his suffering and death (10:32-34), but they disregard it because their eyes are blocked by ambition of gaining power (10:37) and false security of wealth (10:28). They think Jesus is going to be a great king, and they want to share in his power and glory. James and John, for example, ask Jesus to grant them the most powerful positions when he is in his glory (10:35f; Mt 20:20-28) right after he announces his condemnation and death in verse 34. Again, Jesus insists that they must be servants and slaves like him who comes not “to be served but to serve” (10:42-45; Lk 12:25-27). Jesus not only teaches true servanthood but lives it by giving up his life as a “ransom” for many (10:45).

When Jesus calls his first disciples, he tells them that he will make them “fishers of men” (1:17). He chooses the twelve and gives them “authority over unclean spirits” (6:7). He instructs them how to prepare for their journey (6:8-11). They go out and do what Jesus taught them to do: preaching repentance, driving out demons, and curing the sick (6:12-13). They are so in tune to this power given by the Son of God, the strong one, that they lose sight of “the Son of Man,” the suffering one. “Jesus truly is the Son of God, but the God he reveals is not an exalted potentate but a God revealed in the apparent ‘weakness’ of a life totally committed to others.” Thus, true discipleship must reflect what Jesus reveals: He is powerful, but he chooses not to “lord it over” but “to serve and to give his life” for others (10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27). Following Jesus means being like him and doing what he did, not “to gain the whole world” as the disciples then and Christians now often wish to achieve, but to identify with his sufferings in service of God and others. This is a real challenge for all who wish to follow Jesus.

Ecclesiology: Church as School of Discipleship

Obviously, the Church as a community of disciples has a primary purpose to meet this challenge—to follow Jesus and bring his mission of service to the world. The Church carries out its mission in several ways. In Models of the Church, Avery Dulles uses several models to shed light on the Church: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples. Why so many? He provides his reason:

Because the images are derived from the finite realities of experience, they are never adequate to represent the mystery of grace. Each model of the Church has its weaknesses; no one should be canonized as the measure of all the rest. Instead of

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searching for some absolutely best image, it would be advisable to recognize that the manifold images given to us by Scripture and Tradition are mutually complementary.\textsuperscript{84}

A model is simply an image that helps us get a better understanding of a complex reality. Images are clearly inadequate. They illumine certain phenomena but not others. Each of them exhibits only some particular aspects of the reality. Each is like a facet of the Church. It is not the Church itself, only a facet of it. An image or a model used alone can lead to a distortion of the reality it represents. These models must be integrated together to form a more comprehensive model of church. It is the recent addition of the last model, community of disciples, which further describes some aspects of the family and appeals to our time.

Implicitly, Dulles appears to view this last model as a kind of unifying thread running through the five previous models, and one that tends to “harmonize the differences” among them.\textsuperscript{85} This image is originally used by John Paul II to apply to the Church in his first encyclical, \textit{Redemptor Hominis}.\textsuperscript{86} This image or model is solidly grounded in the New Testament, in the action of Jesus in his public life of gathering around him a group of followers, both men and women.\textsuperscript{87} Among those who followed him were his chosen inner circle of close friends, known as “the Twelve.” As risen Lord, Jesus brings them back together, after they have left him and fled. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the number of those who believe in him expands rapidly. Luke calls those who believe “disciples,” and in Acts 6:2 he refers them to “the community of the disciples.” This image emphasizes personal experience of Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 198.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 199.
The three basic elements of following the Lord in the New Testament are outlined best in Mark 3:3-15: called, to be with, and to be sent out. The stress in a vision of church as a community of disciples seems to be on the second aspect. To be a disciple means first and foremost to be with the Lord, to have been called by him into intimacy, to have firsthand knowledge of him. According to 1 John 1:1-4, to be a disciple means to have seen, touched, and lived with the Lord before one can be sent out. Mission means to witness to one’s own experience of the Lord.

The discipleship model gives a real boost to evangelization and service, the emphases of the fourth and fifth models. In the heyday of the institutional model, evangelization was the prerogative of priests and religious. But Vatican II has insisted that “the obligation of spreading the faith falls individually on every disciple of Christ.”88 Besides proclaiming the good news (in the herald model) the community of the disciples of Jesus, both as individuals and together, must also reproduce the deeds of Jesus (in the servant model). It must fight poverty and disease, bring compassion and healing to the sick and the dying, and help others in need.

Dulles stresses further that the discipleship model “motivates the members of the Church to imitate Jesus in their personal lives.”89 He also suggests that the same qualities which make the Church the sacrament of Christ also make it the community of disciples. In both models, the Church has its origins in Christ. In both too the Church is the representative of Christ (Lk 10:16; Mt 10:40-42; Jn 13:20). In the third place, Jesus Christ is really present in the community of

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88 Lumen Gentium, no. 17.
89 Dulles, Models of the Church, 214.
disciples as in a sacrament. Indeed, to feed or clothe those in need is to feed or clothe Jesus himself (Mt 25:35-40), and to persecute them is to persecute Jesus in his members (Acts 9:5).  

But community of disciples is a somewhat better designation than sacrament, since the latter is somewhat impersonal and because it also suggests that the Church is without defect. Community of disciples displays the reality that the Church is deficient and needs correction.  

Dulles observes the nature of being a disciple in his other work: “The disciple is by definition one who has not yet arrived, a learner... to be a disciple... is to be still on the way to full conversion and blessedness of life.” The idea of community of disciples incorporates the process of learning into the nature of Church. The Church is always involved in a process of education which not only informs a person, but forms and transforms him or her as well.

Though it seems that this model is a synthesis of all other models, Dulles always emphasizes the use of all models to understand the whole mystery of the Church. One model only reflects one facet of the Church. He advises:

The community of disciples is only one perspective on the church. Other images and models, such as servant, sacrament, mystical body, and institution, are needed to remind us that the church is an organic and juridically organized community established by the Lord and animated by his Spirit. Through reflection on these models, we can continually enrich our understanding of discipleship itself.

The image of the Church as a community of disciples does express many dimensions of the Church as a whole. One of these dimensions is the analogy of the Church as the Body of Christ. The community of disciples, as a visible extension of Christ in the world, functions as his

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90 Ibid., 214.  
91 Ibid., 215-216.  
93 Dulles, Models of the Church, 226.
“Body” by manifesting his presence and carrying out his mission. In this divine-commissioning role, members of his Body meet a costly condition as Dietrich Bonhoeffer eloquently said in his book, The Cost of Discipleship: “When Christ calls someone, he bids that person come and die.”94 The question is can the Christian family meets this challenge of following Jesus.

Family as Church

Above I used the models that Dulles provides to understand the nature of the Church. If the family has the ecclesial nature, is it legitimately called a church? That is if the family has the ecclesiastic structures, then is it properly called a church? Family is a small community of people who are called by virtue of their baptism to follow Jesus, to become his disciples. It is truly a community of disciples and thus it reflects this dynamic of the Church. The analogous language has been used since Vatican II to talk about the family as church, but when John Paul II came to the scene he called the family the church.95

From Analogy to Ontology

Atkinson in his recent article, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” expounds on this issue. He identifies three stages of the development of the term “domestic church” initiated by Vatican II, which could only use analogous language about the family and church. The ontological language was employed later in the third stage with the publication of The Catechism of the Catholic Church in 1992: “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for

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95 John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 21.
this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.”96 He observes: “In an observable development of doctrine, domestic church moved from an analogous position to an ontological relationship with the Church.”97 For him, the discussion is no longer about the existence of such development, but rather about its legitimacy.98

Ennio Mastroianni in his very current article, “Domestic Church as a Sacramental Model,” gives a serious caution: “The theologians and pastoral ministers ought to avoid speaking about domestic church as if it is an entity.”99 For him “it is more accurate to speak about the entities of Christian marriages and Christian families.”100 By analyzing the text about marriage and family in Lumen Gentium, he concludes that the proper way to speak of domestic church is: “domestic church is an image and model for explicating the ecclesial dimension of the mystery of Christian marriage and its family.”101 Since it is only an image or model, it cannot express the totality of a mystery. So, according to Mastroianni, the Church needs additional models for understanding Christian marriage and family.

There is very little doubt that the family is a church-like reality, an ecclesial reality. John Paul II in his exhortation, Familiaris Consortio, recognizes the role of the Christian family in God’s plan from the beginning, the role that God calls the family to perform. He commands the family to become what they are because it finds in God’s plan not only its identity but also its mission. In the beginning, God established the family as “an intimate community of life and

96 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2204.
97 Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 593.
98 Ibid., 592-604.
99 Annio Mastroianni, “Domestic Church as a Sacramental Model,” INTAMS review (2012), 44.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 52.
love”\(^\text{102}\) and thus the family has a mission to actualize this community. It is called “to guard, reveal, and communicate love.”\(^\text{103}\) From this perspective, he insists: “Every particular task of the family is an expressive and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission.”\(^\text{104}\) From this foundation, he identifies four general aspects of the family: (1) forming a community of persons, (2) serving life, (3) participating in the development of society, and (4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church. These are marks of the family and also of the Church.

The family by its easily observable structure is a community of persons. It is where the relationship of husband and wife, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of relatives and members of the household is most obviously seen. Its first task is to form an authentic community and to live this communion with fidelity. Love is the inner principle of this task and the permanent power of this communion. As John Paul II points out: “without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons.”\(^\text{105}\) The love among members of the family gives life that leads the family to deeper and more intense communion. The love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes the family community and communion. It is in this understanding of the family as a community and communion of persons that John Paul II claims: “The Christian family

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\(^{103}\) John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 17.

\(^{104}\) Ibid.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., no. 18.
constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church.’”

In serving life, the Church is called to stand for life and protect human dignity. “The Church is called upon to manifest anew to everyone, with clear and stronger conviction, her will to promote human life by every means and to defend it against all attacks, in whatever condition or state of development it is found.” The fundamental and principal duty is to defend and protect the inviolable dignity of every human person. In fact, nobody can deny that the value of one person surpasses or transcends all the material objects. Nothing can be compared to the life and value of a human being. Therefore, the dignity of the person is the most precious possession of the individual. For this reason, “every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offence against the Creator of the individual.”

In effect, the acknowledgement of the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect and defense of the right to life of the human person. If the dignity of a person is inviolable, his or her right to life is also inviolable because it is an intrinsic and universal right given by God. There are several common human rights, but all of them are “false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.”

Like the Church whose mission is to serve life, the family is called to this task in an even more special way. There is nowhere else “the transmission of life” can be found other than the

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106 Ibid., no. 21.
107 Ibid., no. 30.
108 John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, no. 37.
109 Ibid., no. 38.
family. God the Creator granted the family a special sharing in his love and power to transmit the gift of human life. “Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator—that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person.”\textsuperscript{110}

This task is nurtured and taught in the family—the first community and “the basic cell of society.”\textsuperscript{111} The family is the first and foremost environment where we primarily receive our educations and instructions about a communion of individuals living and working together. John Paul II has no hesitation in claiming that “the family is the first and fundamental school of social living.”\textsuperscript{112} In the sacrament of marriage, married couples receive their primary vocation of giving education. As parents they carry out this vocation, a vocation rooted in their participation in God’s creative activity. The Second Vatican Council recognized their significant ministry:

Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs.\textsuperscript{113}

Here, in this school of virtues, we learn essential values of human life which later can extend to public life in society. It is considered as “the first and vital cell of society.”\textsuperscript{114} It has “vital and organic links with society” because the family is the society’s foundation where

\textsuperscript{110} John Paul II, \textit{Familiaris Consortio}, no. 28.
\textsuperscript{111} John Paul II, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, no. 40.
\textsuperscript{112} John Paul II, \textit{Familiaris Consortio}, no. 37.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Gravissimum Educationis}, no. 3, quoted in John Paul II, \textit{Familiaris Consortio}, no. 36.
\textsuperscript{114} John Paul, \textit{Familiaris Consortio}, no. 42.
citizens are born and educated.\footnote{Ibid.} Seeing an interdependence and reciprocity between the person and society and highly emphasizing the importance of family, John Paul II raises the family to “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society.”\footnote{John Paul II, \textit{Christifideles Laici}, no. 40.} If the harmony of the society is determined by the harmony in the family then we must pay more attention to this “basic cell” of the society. John Paul II, in fact, affirms that saving the family will save the society itself, and he concludes: “The \textit{lay faithful’s duty to society primarily begins} in marriage and in the family.”\footnote{Ibid., no. 40.}

The Church with her mission to bring the Good News to the world and transform the society never overlooks the reality that the role of the family is essential and irreplaceable in the life of the Church. In fact, through the family children first experience the Church, gaining knowledge of faith and love of Jesus Christ. Christian parents indeed become “the first heralds of the Gospel for their children” by virtue of their ministry of educating and through the witnesses of their lives.\footnote{John Paul II, \textit{Familiaris Consortio}, no. 39.} It is in this way that “family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The family is indeed participating in the life and mission of the Church through its ecclesial task—building up the kingdom of God. The family is not only “a saved community” where its members receive the saving gift of Christ as people of God, but “a saving community” because it witnesses and carries out the saving mission received from Christ. Like the Church, the family is sharing this mission by listening and proclaiming the Word of God, by celebrating
the sacraments, and by continuously living the commandment of love. The family in its own way, as John Paul II points out, “is a living image and historical presentation of the mystery of the Church.”

The family manifests this living image of the kingdom of God through the everyday realities. The U.S. Bishops in their document, *Follow the Way of Love*, express their concerns for family and their intuitions that ordinary and mundane moments of life can become instruments for holiness. “The profound and the ordinary moments of daily life—mealtimes, workdays, vacations, expressions of love and intimacy, household chores, caring for a sick child or elderly parent, and even conflicts over things like how to celebrate holidays, discipline children, or spend money—all are the threads from which you can weave a pattern of holiness.” John Paul II sees love and life as “the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church”: It is “in the love between husband and wife and between the members of the family—a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity and fruitfulness that the Christian family’s participation in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of His Church finds expression and realization.”

By participating in the life and mission of the Church, the family is entitled a much deeper relationship: its relationship to Christ himself. Following Jesus the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Christian family shares these “three aspects of a single reality” being (1) a believing

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120 Ibid., 49.
121 U.S. Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love*. (This is an online document with no number or page reference).
122 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 50.
and evangelizing community, (2) a community in dialogue with God, and (3) a community at the service of humanity. ¹²³

First, the Christian family as a believing and evangelizing community fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the Word of God. Members of the family welcome the Word of God through reading the Scriptures which reveals the Good News of Jesus Christ who sanctifies them. By listening to God who called them to marriage and continues to call them in marriage, God comes to them through the events, problems, and circumstances of everyday life. Every expression of love in the family lived in the Spirit of Christ can become a sign of the loving covenant between God and humans, between Christ and the domestic church. “Thus the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized” so that it can be faithful to its profession of faith. ¹²⁴

Once the Christian family accepts the Gospel and matures in faith, it becomes an evangelizing community. With God’s grace, members of the family can proclaim the Good News to other members of the family and their neighbors. Paul VI says:

The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospels as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part. ¹²⁵

Evangelization can be exercised within the family. The parents’ ministry of evangelization and catechesis to their sons and daughters, especially adolescence and youth,

¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid., no. 51.
¹²⁵ Evangeli Nuntiand i, no. 71, quoted in John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 52.
shares a form of missionary activities of the Church. That is why “‘the Church of the home’ remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis.”

This can also happen when some member of the family does not have faith or does not practice it consistently. In such case the other members of the family show support and encouragement by their living witness of their own faith in Christ.

Evangelization can take place outside of the family’s boundary as well. As Jesus’ disciples, members of the family are commissioned to bring the Good News to others. They are called to manifest the presence of Christ and his love to those who do not yet believe and those who no longer live in accordance with the faith they once received. By reaching out to others outside of their house, they participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church. By fostering missionary vocations among their sons and daughters, they contribute to the missionary cause of the Church. John Paul II insists that “the future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home.”

Second, the Christian family as a community in dialogue with God accomplishes its priestly function through the celebration of the sacraments, through the offering of one’s life, and through the life of prayer. The Church is a priestly people who are always and continuously called by Jesus Christ to engage in a dialogue with God. The Christian family is part of this priestly people. Spouses and parents thus are included in this dialogue and in the universal call to holiness. By the sacrament of marriage, a sacrament of mutual sanctification, they receive a kind of consecration in their duties and responsibilities. By virtue of this sacrament, they fulfill

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126 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 52.
127 Ibid.
their obligations with the help of Christ who fills them with faith, hope, and love. It confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their lives into a sacrifice.\textsuperscript{128}

By partaking in other sacraments, they offer this sacrifice as an act of worship to God. Through sacraments, they receive God’s grace as a source of strength and sustenance of their relationships, and in return are sanctified to become instruments of God’s grace. In the Eucharist, the new and everlasting covenant of love between Christ and the Church, “spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows.”\textsuperscript{129} In Reconciliation, they are led to an encounter with God who brings them back to communion with him, with others, and with themselves, renewing the covenant with God and also the covenant between them.

By living in accord with the priestly gift, the daily lives of married couples are transformed by their welcoming of God in their lives. “This transformation is achieved not only by celebrating the Eucharist and other sacraments and through offering themselves to the glory of God, but also through a life of prayer, through prayerful dialogue with the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{130} Family prayer thus becomes a significant act of worship offered to God who is certainly present to their need. God’s presence is confirmed by Jesus’ promise to members of the family in a special way: “I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where there two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:19-20). John Paul II shows his confidence in this: “The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., no. 56.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., no. 57.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., no. 59.
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it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer."\textsuperscript{131} Family prayer in the domestic church
prepares its members for liturgical prayer of the Church.

Finally, the Christian family as a community at the service of humanity fulfills its kingly
role through humbly serving those in need. It is inspired by the new law of love commanded by
Jesus who modeled a life of service in his example of washing his disciples’ feet. It is called to
exercise this service of love towards God and towards its fellow human beings. Just as Christ
came to serve, so also members of family find the authentic meaning of their participation in his
kingship. Inspired and encouraged by the new commandment of love, they welcome, respect,
and serve each and every human being as a person and as a child of God. The Christian family,
the domestic church, a prophetic, priestly, and kingly people, “is endowed with the mission of
bringing all human beings to accept the word of God in faith, to celebrate and profess it in the
sacraments and in prayer, and to give expression to it in the concrete realities of life in
accordance with the gift and new commandment of love.”\textsuperscript{132}

This discussion leads to a conclusion that the family is indeed a community of the people
of God. It reflects the image of the Church as the People of God, a communion of persons who
are enlivened by the Holy Spirit to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus. The family
following Jesus has the same mission: to build a community of life and love. Its ministry
consists of four principal tasks: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the
development of society, and sharing the life and mission of the Church. By sharing the mission
of the Church, the family receives the role of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. The family is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] Ibid.
\item[132] Ibid. no. 63.
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thus a believing and evangelizing community (prophetic nature), a community in dialogue with God (priestly nature), and a community at the service of humanity (kingly nature). Atkinson concludes: “If it truly shares in the life of the Church, the family cannot be separated from the Church but must be inserted into its very reality thereby becoming true to its nature.”

The understanding of church life as community formed by the Spirit means that salvation is not an individualistic endeavor. As church, the Christian family is a communion of baptized Christians who are called to love and cherish one another as members of the Body of Christ. Together, they form one sacrament of Christ’s presence in the world, sharing in Christ’s teaching and healing ministry.

5. Sacramentality of Domestic Church

Catholicism teaches that any valid marriage of two baptized Christians is sacramental. Is baptism or marriage the foundational sacrament of the domestic church? The U.S. Bishops raise this question in one of their colloquiums: “Our baptismal vocation is basic and antecedent to any other. Matrimony specifies and gives focus to our baptismal commitment. To what extent does Baptism bring the domestic church into being? If this sacrament is also foundational for the domestic church, is the possibility left open for unmarried persons to create a domestic church?” They think a major source of the theology of family as domestic church comes from the sacrament of marriage: “The family (domestic church) is regarded as proceeding from, or

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133 Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 599.
134 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1601.
being rooted in, marriage. Marriage is the origin of family and, therefore, of the domestic church.”

The Bishops, however, clarify the matter later in *Follow the Way of Love* by regarding the sacrament of baptism as the most important source of insight into the nature and mission of domestic churches. They suggest that since “baptism brings all Christians into union with God…family life is sacred because family relationships confirm and deepen this union….” The sacrament of marriage is not mentioned as the foundation of either family or domestic church until they first clarify that Christ’s promise to be faithful is the “firm foundation.”

John Paul II receives the credit for his consistent emphasis on the subject of domestic church since Vatican II, but does not provide a completely concrete answer to the question of how baptism and marriage are related in forming domestic churches. In his exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, he gives varying explanations of the sacramental grounding of the domestic church’s mission, but does not settle on any particular sacrament. He gives no argument for the domestic church’s existence in anything other than a traditional nuclear family—sacramentally married husband and wife raising young children.

Bourg in her book, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, insists that domestic churches are formed by both baptism and marriage, but considers baptism as a domestic church’s primary sacramental foundation. Indeed, baptism is a door for Christians to enter other sacraments. It

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136 Ibid.
137 U.S. Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love*.
138 Ibid.
139 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 38, 49, 56.
140 Bourg, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 76.
141 Ibid., 69-80.
symbolically marks them with Jesus’ name and invites them to commit to his mission.

Sacramental marriage, which serves the obvious purpose of gathering people into families and giving them a unique vocation, on the other hand, is functioning as a public renewal and specification of their baptismal commitment. Through the sacrament of marriage, they continue their mission of manifesting Christ’s living presence in a special way.

Mastroianni who supports the magisterial position that holds the sacrament of marriage as the foundation where a new Christian family arises finds a conflict between Bourg’s idea and the magisterial teaching. In discussing domestic church as a sacramental model, he insists that only in and through the marriage of a baptized man and a baptized woman may a family be understood as a domestic church. In my program, I propose to work with baptized married couples, so the issue of whether their families can be called domestic churches by virtue of baptism or marriage is no longer an issue. These couples were baptized Christians who were married in the Roman Catholic Church. Their families are legitimately called Christian families and thus domestic churches.

Sacrament by definition is a manifestation of Christ’s living presence. The Church is called a “sacrament” because the Church both contains and communicates Christ’s invisible grace. Can a Christian family carry out this communication, a task of signifying and making present God’s grace, a task of manifesting Christ to the world? Only so doing can it become domestic church, a sacramental reality. Some, including scholars and ministers, often assume that Christ cannot be present in, or manifested by, the secular and sinful elements of our world.

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142 Mastroianni, “Domestic Church as a Sacramental Model,” 42.
143 Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 774, 1084, 1131.
They think family life is too mundane and secular to manifest Christ’s presence. Their opponents, on the other side, insistently disagree with this long-standing presumption: “If the idea of domestic church is to have a positive meaning for Christian families, these problematic assumptions must be replaced.”

Perhaps, Haughton’s work published in 1968 prophetically states this problem better than anyone else. For her, if we want to manifest Christ we have to get involved and be full-time Christians:

In order to “manifest Christ’s living presence in the world,” you have to be a full-time Christian. You mustn’t just take part in the work of the Church, you must be the Church, so that people can see what the Church is: the body of Christ… Christians of the most ordinary kind are not just helping to “manifest Christ’s living presence,” or taking part in that manifestation, but are actually able to do it themselves. They don’t do it by joining a guild or going on a pilgrimage or supporting the Catholic schools—however useful these things may be. They do it simply because they are a Christian family.

I believe these words are true because they speak honestly of reality in the Church. Christian families can manifest Christ’s presence because they can cultivate the awareness of his presence trusting in his promise that he will be there in their midst. This manifestation is made possible through the two fundamental Catholic theological principles: mediation and sacramentality. It is in the latter that we understand a sacrament as a visible sign or instrument of the invisible presence and activity of God.

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144 Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 94.
Many authors who give a fair amount of attention to the family mention sacramentality of family in connection with domestic church.\textsuperscript{147} Mastroianni, for example, explores at length a spousal relationship in light of this principle. In discussing the friendship between husband and wife, he writes: “The sacramentality of friendship as spousal love appears prominently in both the ecclesial model of sacrament and the sacramental model of domestic church.”\textsuperscript{148} In the sacramental model of domestic church, baptized spouses signify the mystery of the Christ-Church relationship (Eph 5:32). That is, spousal covenantal love is a visible sign and instrument of the invisible love of Christ and the Church. “Each unique Christian marriage becomes a unique Christian family that uniquely makes present the larger Christ-Church relationship in a clear, visible, and ordered way.”\textsuperscript{149}

Bourg in \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered} tries “to systematically explain why Christian families or domestic churches can manifest Christ’s presence, not only when engaged in explicitly religious activities or displaying their best human qualities, but equally when engaged in mundane, secular affairs, and even when they are mired in suffering, immaturity, and sinfulness.”\textsuperscript{150} She uses Karl Rahner’s thought on the meaning of sacrament in general, along with his notions of liturgy of the world and Church as sacrament, as her key resources.

\textbf{Rahner’s Thought}

Bourg’s discussion of Rahner’s understanding of sacramentality gives light to the understanding of domestic church’s sacramentality. Contrasting with a prevalent theological

\textsuperscript{147} Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered},” 191, see note 5, Chapter 9.
\textsuperscript{148} Mastroianni, “Domestic Church as a Sacramental Model,” 49.
\textsuperscript{149} ibid. 50.
\textsuperscript{150} Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered}, 96.
tradition founded upon the premise that God is encountered primarily in the sacred realm—the
domain of the Church, especially its sacraments—Rahner constructs a theology of sacramentality
upon the conviction that the so-called secular world is permeated by God’s grace. If God is to be
encountered at all, it is in the ordinary, often troubled existence of family life in the real world.
His sacramental theology revolves around a principle originating in Thomas Aquinas’ theology:
“God has not attached his power to the sacraments in such a way that he could not also impart
the effects of sacramental grace even without the sacraments themselves.”151

Rahner grounds his theology in two different models used to depict God’s grace in
Catholicism. The first model emphasizes that God gives grace in identifiable historical events,
through the authoritative Church, in a completely unmerited way. In this model, the world is
depicted as secular in contrast to sacred. God’s grace nonetheless becomes present and available
as free gift in this secular and sinful world to which it is mostly denied.152 Rahner puts it this
way: Historical events are “events at certain points in space and time where grace comes to be in
a world otherwise deprived of it….”153 They produce something that is otherwise unavailable.
The Church, as custodian of the sacraments, becomes a place of refuge where God’s mysterious
grace becomes available for nourishment needed to tolerate the demands of the secular world.

The second model of grace is based on convictions that sanctifying grace is present
everywhere provided that humans have not closed themselves off by denial, and this grace is
made effective in the concrete events of human history, wherever humans live in a manner that

153 Ibid.
The pervasiveness of grace is evidenced by the basic human experience of “transcendence.” We experience ourselves as free and responsible agents, and as persons who yearn for what lies beyond the “horizon” of worldly limitation. These everyday events reveal that yearning and longing for God is a basic element of all human experiences.  

This second model of grace is an explanation of how grace is mediated through the concrete events of everyday life. This model sheds light on our analysis of domestic church because it undermines the most problematic assumption that family life is too mundane and sinful to manifest Christ’s presence. Bourg explains: “If the mission of the Church as sacrament is to make Christ’s presence known to specific individuals, concretely, at decisive moments of their lives, and to elicit some sort of incarnate response, then Church and sacrament must somehow reach into everyday life, including family life. It is in keeping with God’s plan of revelation that Christian family life function as church of the home and as sacrament.” The totality of God’s revelation of his grace can be seen most clearly in what is called “the liturgy of the world.”

Liturgy of the World/Cosmos

Bourg in discussing the liturgy of the world follows Rahner: “In contrast to theologies that tend to draw distinctions between sacraments and other Church activities, between religious and secular lives of Christians, and between the Church and the world, Rahner insists that there is one sacramental process of salvation with many phases—some institutional, some not—but all 

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154 Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 98. Also see note 12 on page 192.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., 100.
equally necessary.” Rahner coins the expression “liturgy of the world” to emphasize the continuity of varied sacramental encounters with God. Dryer quoting Rahner agrees that “the context for union with God today is cosmic.” She uses the term “cosmic liturgy” to describe her intuition. For her, “there is a sacredness that lies deep within nature, persons, and cosmos. Daily life is a sacred, worldly arena in which liturgy is celebrated.” Thus, there are not two separate spheres of existence to be distinguished between “sacred” and “secular.” The difference refers not to the presence or absence of God, but to the degree to which God’s presence is recognized. In the eyes of faith, every ordinary life experience can become an instrument of grace.

The discovery of the sacredness of everyday life is at stake in our consideration of domestic church. Dryer reminds us that “God is already in the world in more ways and more intimately than we can imagine.” God is incarnate in every part of the world. The incarnation brings new meaning to our existence because of the union between the divine and human. Every aspect of our life is already a sign of the divine presence. What we say and do will not only tell but show the world God’s presence or absence. “Grace is present everywhere except where we have chosen to cut ourselves off from God.”

Following this understanding, it seems that domestic church is the most basic arena where the liturgy of the world finds explicitly Christian, sacramental, and thereby ecclesial,

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158 Ibid.
159 Dryer, Earth Crammed with Heaven, 49.
160 Ibid., 170.
161 Ibid., 170-175. Also see Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 100.
162 Dryer, Earth Crammed with Heaven, 110.
163 Ibid., 173.
expression. In the language of the liturgy of the world, God’s presence in ordinary life supports
the proposition that domestic church be seen as the forum where the Church as sacrament does
its most basic work. Bourg explains:

It no longer appears ridiculous to claim that Christ’s presence can be discovered in family
life, or that Christian families are a form of church. Instead, we can assert that an
explicitly Christian sense of God’s presence, love, and mercy are usually cultivated
through family life if at all and that, if God is not experienced in the ordinaries and
imperfection of our homes, the Good News proclaimed and sacramentally ritualized by
the institutional Church will be regarded as foreign and incredible rather than the
fulfillment of our most urgent questions and striving.164

In the same line of reasoning, the U.S. Bishops speak of domestic church in light of
everyday sacredness: “The recognizing and naming of the ‘sacred in the ordinary’ is the
necessary substratum for an awareness of domestic church. Something must first be called holy
before it can be identified as a work of the domestic church.”165 Of course, the institutional
Church’s liturgy is best understood as the “symbol” of the liturgy of the world because the
Church as basic sacrament is the public, historical, concrete, and certain proclamation of God’s
presence in the world.166

The exploration of the sacramentality of domestic church suggests that individual
domestic churches are not self-sufficient in cultivating sacramental perspective by themselves.
Each relies on the resources of the larger Church community, including other household
communities, to nurture sacramental perspective at all stages of its development.167 Like the
Church, domestic church as sacrament will never perfectly manifest Christ, the reality it seeks to

164 Ibid., 101-102.
166 Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 101.
167 Ibid., 107.
Christ, however, is always present and the Christian family, the domestic church, is always called to make his presence as perfect as possible.

Conclusion

In light of the liturgy of the world, we can conclude that the Christian family as a domestic church is indeed a sacrament, for like the Church it has the capacity to manifest Christ’s presence. The sacramental foundation of domestic church is found in both Baptism and Matrimony. It is also through these two sacraments that the theology and ecclesiology of domestic church are grounded. Through them the members of the Christian family enter a covenantal relationship with God and the Church and become disciples of Christ. The loving covenant between God the Trinity and his people is understood to be set first with Abraham and his family. This covenant is transferred and rooted in Jesus and his family. Those who follow him form a community of disciples called the Church.

In the image of the Church as the community of disciples we find the expression of the Christian family as domestic church. As an ecclesial reality, the Christian family displays the four marks of the Church: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the development of society, and sharing in the life and mission of the Church. By participating in the life and mission of the Church, domestic church fulfills its prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles. The Christian family as domestic church expresses itself from different sacramental and ecclesial characteristics. One of these is the life of prayer.

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168 Ibid., 119.
“This practice \textit{lectio divina} will bring to the Church … a new spiritual springtime.”\textsuperscript{169}

Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI in his address to the participants of a meeting organized to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of \textit{Dei Verbum} in 2005 spoke in strong support of the practice of \textit{lectio divina}:

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of \textit{lectio divina}: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. \textit{Dei Verbum}, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, \textit{lectio divina} should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times.\textsuperscript{170}

What is \textit{lectio divina}? Why is Pope Benedict so convinced of its fruitful benefit that it should be “increasingly encouraged”?

\textit{Lectio divina} means “sacred reading” or “spiritual reading.” It describes an ancient technique of prayer, a way of reading the scriptures for spiritual formation. This ancient practice of reading aims at letting go of our own agenda and opening ourselves to what God wants to say to us. Today in our digital age, we are more and more aware of the powerful impact of the


\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
digital text. In a period when computer literacy becomes more and more penetrating in every corner of life, we probably need to ask if we have lost the ancient art of reading—“reading to live”\(^\text{171}\)—reading to nourish the soul. Have we lost the ability to read the Scriptures in such a way that we might gain meaning and direction for our lives, especially for our marriage and family lives? Unfortunately, many seem to agree that we have.\(^\text{172}\) Mulholland, for example, insists that we are deeply “ingrained” in a way of reading that is “detrimental to the role of scripture in spiritual formation.”\(^\text{173}\) Studzinski in his article, “Reading and Ministry: Applying Lectio Divina Principles in a Ministerial Context,” pushes further: “Indeed, what impedes some on the road to spiritual growth, even some of those engaged in church ministries, is precisely their inability to read spiritually, that is, to read in such a way that they are spiritually challenged and not just given information.”\(^\text{174}\) The approach of reading needed in our time is formational rather than informational.

The good news is lectio divina can be appropriated for today’s world if “carefully thought through and in step with the times” as Pope Benedict suggests. Studzinski advises: “Lectio divina is precisely a tool that can be put at the service of fashioning a spiritual self for contemporary seekers. Yet this tool cannot simply be extracted from the centuries when it was


\(^\text{173}\) Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 19.

\(^\text{174}\) Studzinski, “Reading and Ministry,” 614.
first developed and appropriated without some critical awareness and sensitivity.”

When Vatican II called us to return to the Scriptures, the Council also challenged us to read the “signs of the times.” One of the signs of our time is the need for spiritual formation and mature faith in the family where nurture and support are definitely required. A detailed examination of this spiritual reading in marriage and family will reveal its effective benefits, but first let us look at the historical testimonies to this art of reading.

6. Lectio—A Brief History

*Lectio divina* had its roots in the monastic life during the time when the printing press had not been invented and there were not many texts to read. Because text was scarce, monks learned to read to one another. They read not to transfer the information, but to savor the Word of God. They read not to gain information, but to train themselves in spiritual formation. Thus, they read in a slow and reverent mode. This way of reading set the foundation for the practice of *lectio divina*. It became a method of spiritual discipline for those who were seeking religious life. It proved to have a healing benefit: “The practice of *lectio divina*, developed through the monastic centuries, could bring healing to those who had been blinded by sin.”

Although *lectio divina* has been known to be established during the monastic era, Christian religious reading is actually rooted in Judaism. Reading and studying the Word of God has always been significant in the tradition of the Hebrew people. Reading the Torah to the assembled community was commonplace in Judaism’s history, and public readings have

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175 Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 18.
177 Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 17.
assumed an important role in Jewish life. Devout Jews center their lives around the Word. They “embody the Word and weave it into life so that the sacred text becomes the context for all activities.”¹⁷⁸ This practice continues to the time of Jesus. The New Testament provides testimony to Jesus reading from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-30). Christianity, emerging within a Jewish milieu, shares this devotion to the Word and sees the Word fully “enfleshed” in Jesus.¹⁷⁹

Like their Jewish ancestors, early Christians read the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, their own texts, in the context of liturgical assemblies. The liturgical reading of sacred texts eventually gave rise to a form of private reading once texts were readily available. Origen (185-234), who provided a detailed Christian approach to reading sacred texts, for instance, was considered the first and the most important master in Christian tradition of religious reading. For him, “the Scriptures were the locus for an encounter between God and humans. Indeed, he believed the Word, the Logos, was incarnate in the Scriptures and could there touch and teach readers and hearers.”¹⁸⁰ Seeing the Scriptures this way, he proposed the Scripture as sacrament mediating the real presence of God. For him, the Scriptures are full of symbols that connect us to the divine mysteries. The literal text is indeed the sacramental medium that puts us in touch with the sacred hidden in the spiritual sense of the message. The visible reality is the image helping us to arrive at the deeper meaning, the invisible reality.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 26.
¹⁷⁹ Studzinski, Reading to Live, 22-26.
¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.
Origen’s approach to the Scriptures is “an exemplarist worldview”: “the visible world is a symbolic one whose purpose is not to ensnare us but to lead us to a lasting, divine realm.”\textsuperscript{181}

Origen discovered certain principles that form the backbone of his approach to reading the Scriptures and provided us a way to reach the spiritual sense of a message. He found four principles fundamental for interpretation. First, the major interpretive principle of the Scriptures is Christ. For Origen, Christ is God’s perfect Word to humanity and thus all scriptural texts are secondary to Christ. Christ as interpretive key means every scriptural reading must be read in the light of Christ. Everything in the Scriptures has meaning for Christian believers only because of their life in Christ. Christ is the source, the content, and the meaning of the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{182}

A second interpretive principle acknowledges the fundamental unity of the Scriptures. It means “Scripture should interpret Scripture.”\textsuperscript{183} In other words, other scriptural texts can illuminate the spiritual meaning of a given text. Difficult texts, for example, can be understood by comparing them with other scriptural texts under the Spirit’s guidance. A third interpretive principle is the principle of usefulness. That is, the Scriptures were written for us and we are justified to specify how they might speak to us as contemporary readers and hearers. A fourth interpretive principle concerns a movement from the sensible to the spiritual, from the temporal to the eternal, and from the letter to the spirit. In this final principle, Origen invited readers to move beyond the literal text to the spiritual level.\textsuperscript{184} He intended that reading, in contact with the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 31.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 34-35.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 36.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 36-37.
\end{itemize}
deeper meaning of the Scriptures, brings about a transformation of the readers, the transformation that leads to service of others.

Reading for Origen is like “digging wells and drawing water” from them. He recommended a daily exposure to the Word of God just as we daily drink water from the well. Those who do not come faithfully to the well of the Scriptures will live with thirst. The Word is not just to be heard or read; it must also occupy a place in one’s conversation, thoughts, and heart. Meditating day and night on the Word of God for him is a prerequisite to finding and receiving the word of wisdom. Meditating, coupled with heartfelt prayer inviting the Holy Spirit, opens us to recognize the human words as the Word of God. In some places, Origen insisted on the importance of a reader’s having “the mind of Christ.” Acquiring the mind of Christ requires coming frequently and regularly to the well of the Scriptures. Through drinking the water of the written words of Scriptures one prepares oneself to receive the water Christ gives, which is knowledge beyond written words.

Reading is also like visiting a doctor. Jesus is the divine physician, a doctor who is himself the Word of God. The medicine is the words of Scripture. The doctor prepares the medications for the sick who are attacked by the virus of sin. Sin has obscured the image of God within the person. Reading the Scriptures is like taking the medications to remove all the contaminated images that cloud the heavenly image of God. Since different people have different sickness and thus need different medicines, not everyone is nourished by one and the same Word. The appropriate medicine will free the person from the sickness of sin and restore

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185 Ibid., 38.
186 Studzinski, Reading to Live, 38-44
the heavenly image, the inner self. This is the goal of scriptural reading for Origen: to transform a reader “from a sinful state to perfection,” a healthy condition.\(^{187}\)

Like Origen, Augustine (354-430) saw the connection between scriptural reading and self-transformation. He believed that the practice of reading the Scriptures could become a life-changing and life-sustaining activity. His conversion was a powerful testimony to this transformative power. While he was meditating on the Scriptures, he heard a voice saying: “Pick it up and read, pick it up and read.”\(^{188}\) He picked up the Bible and read a line from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh” (13:13-14). This message suddenly resolved his struggles and completely changed him. Through reading the Scriptures, he came to read himself differently; he definitely turned around, redirecting his life. Reading the Scriptures, as Augustine experienced, is truly self-transformative. Reading the Scriptures is an encounter with Christ in whom the transformative power is found. Through reading scriptural texts and appropriating their spiritual meaning, he learned that sacred reading could build a new self.\(^{189}\)

The principal standard for measuring the development of this new self is love. Whoever thinks he understands the divine Scriptures and does not love God and his neighbor at the same time, for Augustine, does not understand at all. The purpose of reading and striving to understand the Scriptures is love. The outcome of reading the Scriptures and acting on them is also love. Scriptural reading with love is self-reforming: “Through knowledge of the Scriptures

\(^{187}\) Ibid., 44-46.
\(^{188}\) Augustine, *Confessions*, 8:29, quoted in Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 75.
\(^{189}\) Studzinski, *Reading to Live*, 74-87.
the reader discovers attachments to temporal things, repents, and turns toward eternal things. Further purification increases the love shown to God, neighbor, and even enemies and finally brings the reader to wisdom and the enjoyment of peace and tranquility.\textsuperscript{190}

The practice of reading the Scriptures continued to prevail in the monastic movements where it would be incorporated as an essential discipline in achieving union with God. Desert ascetics realized that reading the Scriptures both provided an antidote to evil tendencies and nourished the spirit. They placed tremendous importance on the words of Scriptures, which they believed had the power to restore centeredness and tranquility. Scriptures told them how to live, provided ethical guidelines and models of life, and gave direction for the spiritual journey. Biblical texts thus became scripts to be performed, to be lived out in concrete details of daily existence.\textsuperscript{191}

This monastic understanding of scriptural reading is reflected in the works of John Cassian (ca. 360-435). What Cassian contributed to monastic reading is his emphasis on the role of prayer. He used the Latin word \textit{oratio} to indicate the period of quiet prayer following the recitation of a psalm and the term \textit{mediatio} to indicate the repeated reciting of memorized texts until they became part of one’s being. These two exercises served the purpose of filling the mind with nourishing words. Prayer should preface the reading, preparing the reader to receive the Word of God like a field being cultivated to receive the rain. The Word would guide readers to the path of holiness.\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{191} Studzinski, Reading to Live, 93-108.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 115-121.
This path of holiness was promoted by certain guidelines and rules. The two well-known monastic rules are the rule of St. Benedict and the rule of the Master. They gave instructions and regulations for monastic life. St. Benedict (ca. 480-ca. 550) gave reading, which he called *lectio divina*, a prominent place in the monastic life. Monks and nuns spent hours in reading.\(^{193}\) He recognized the significant impact of *lectio* on readers: “Reading, meditating, and praying centered on the Word of God gradually inscribed that Word in fleshly existence and transformed the monastic into a self that, like an illuminated manuscript, rendered the sacred text in a colorful, artistic way for others to ‘read’.”\(^ {194}\) Reading shaped and formed virtuous selves. As a person performed the reading of the Scriptures, he or she gradually acquired virtues. Often the shaping came about when the readers tried to imitate what they read. The secular or worldly character of the old self gave way to a monastic character, a new self.\(^ {195}\)

**The New Turn of *Lectio Divina***

Monastic reading faced its down turn during the time of the monastic reform at Cluny and the emergence of scholasticism. With Cluniac heavy emphasis on the liturgy, reading no longer was the primary focus of the monastic life.\(^ {196}\) A different type of reading emerged with the birth of scholasticism—scholastic reading, which gradually gained prominence over monastic reading. Scholastic reading put emphasis on intellectual clarity and careful philosophical argument, using abstract terminology to convey the mystical realities of God and humanity. A text was no longer a script for life but functioned as a guide to abstraction and

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\(^{193}\) Ibid., 123.  
\(^{194}\) Ibid., 126.  
\(^{195}\) Ibid., 122-130.  
\(^{196}\) Ibid., 141-142.
logical reasoning. The practice of *lectio* was threatened by growing interest in intellectual reading associated with the rise of scholasticism.\(^{197}\)

Several figures within monasticism diligently worked to preserve *lectio divina* during this time. One of the prominent figures who devoted himself to the preserving work was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). Bernard “gave explicit attention to the role of affectivity in the process of personal reform and return to God through *lectio*,”\(^{198}\) The word of God, for him, illuminated darkness and sinfulness which were overcome through conversion that aimed at restoring the image of God that had been obscured by sin. The role of Scriptures was to guide the conversion process. For him, reading was not only intellectual but also affective activities. He thus “opposed the ‘learned’ approach to *lectio* emerging in the wake of scholasticism, and favored a more sense-oriented or experiential way of reading.”\(^{199}\) Proper reading was a slow process of “chewing the words” like one was tasting food.\(^{200}\) The word of God, Bernard said, was “the manna that will satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart.”\(^{201}\)

Bernard whose approach was very similar to Origen’s put forward his purpose that was not to explain words but to move hearts.\(^{202}\) One does not just read; one lives the Scriptures. In order to live the Scriptures, to nourish and strengthen the soul, one should move beyond the face of the Scriptures, the literal sense, to the deeper meaning, the spiritual sense. As the text is assimilated, the reader is converted by the Scriptures. Bernard believed that there are three

\(^{197}\) Ibid. 172.  
\(^{198}\) Ibid. 146.  
\(^{199}\) Ibid. 148.  
\(^{200}\) Ibid. 157.  
\(^{201}\) Ibid. 157.  
\(^{202}\) Ibid. 160.
stages in the process of conversion by the Scriptures: “first come discipline and the acquisition of knowledge about God, then appropriate affections as the Word is internalized, and finally a new way of living and experiencing.”\(^{203}\) The transformation takes place in the final stage when “‘every action, every word, look, movement, and even laugh (if there should be laughter) radiates.’”\(^{204}\) This conversion for Bernard is always linked to reading.

With the same purpose of drawing people back to the meditative reading of the Scriptures, Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) and Guigo II (d. 1188) joined Bernard in revitalizing the practice as it was threatened by the growing interest in the intellectual reading of the scholastic movement. Like those who valued *lectio*, Hugh saw the significance of both reading and meditation, but reading held the first place in instruction. For him, the goal of human striving was to gain wisdom, and reading was the means of achieving such wisdom. Like his predecessors, Hugh favored the slow moving through the scriptural text because through slow, meditative reading one encountered the Word, the Wisdom of God. He laid out a five-step reading process to move to God. The first four were reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation. The last was performance which was to put into action what had been read and meditated upon.\(^{205}\)

Likewise, Guigo sketched four stages of reading process as “rungs” of a ladder that leads to God: “reading searches for sweetness, meditation pinpoints it, prayer requests it, and contemplation savors it.”\(^{206}\) These steps of the reading process are correspondent to the stages of

\(^{203}\) Ibid., 159.
\(^{204}\) Ibid., 160.
\(^{205}\) Ibid., 165.
\(^{206}\) Ibid., 170.
a person’s spiritual life: “Beginners” are those at the first stage of reading, concerning with
mastery of the literal text; “proficients” preoccupy with meditation; “devotees” concern more
properly with prayer; and finally “the blessed” are concerned with contemplation.207 Facing the
threat of scholastic reading, both Hugh and Guigo tried wholeheartedly to defend and revive the
ancient practice with some successes.

The Revival of Lectio Divina

This classic practice of scriptural reading is revived and brought back into the fore around
sixteenth century when the vernacular Bible was available and the Scriptures became more
accessible to people. In the effort to understand biblical texts, the historical-critical methods
emerged. With this new critical approach, the debate between reading for literal or historical
sense and spiritual sense began. The spiritual practice of lectio divina was again recognized as
“a more equal partner in the debate.”208 Jean Leclercq wrote about the value of the spiritual
senses in lectio:

Christian reading of Scripture is not primarily an intellectual exercise resulting from the
correct use of a scientific method. It is essentially an experience of Christ, in the Spirit.
Within this experience there is, of course, room for method, science and use of
instruments of work and study, the knowledge of philosophy, archeology and history.
But these alone will never result in lectio divina, a Christian reading, a reading in the
Spirit, a reading of Christ and in Christ, with Christ and for Christ.209

The Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) in its “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine
Revelation,” Dei Verbum, took a major step in promoting a return to the Christian reading of the
Scriptures:

207 Ibid., 171.
208 Ibid., 191.
The sacred synod ... earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful ... to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:8)... Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids...210

In this passage, the Council recognized the significance of scriptural reading in Christian life. It recovered the practice of lectio divina and encouraged people to read more frequently because through the Scriptures Christians come to know Jesus and act like him. Realizing its tremendous benefits, the Catholic Church further promoted the practice in 1993 with the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church. In this document, though briefly, the Church recognized the practice as an appropriate use for nourishing the soul.211 The Church further approved this practice in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.212 Pope Benedict XVI recently recalled and recommended the ancient tradition of lectio divina, saying that it would bring “a new spiritual springtime.”213

Lectio Divina, once an ancient practice of scriptural reading, is now a more demanding practice of Christian spirituality. It transforms life, builds character, and leads people to act in virtuous ways. It promises to change people in a transformative way. Studzinski observes: “As a result of the practice of lectio people find themselves feeling, imagining, thinking, and acting differently. They acquire the ‘mind of Christ’ and are readied to transform the world as Christ did.”214 Lectio divina with its transformative power becomes the inspiration for daily activities and supplies daily food for spiritual journey. Its power, however, depends on the reader’s

210 Dei Verbum, no. 25.
211 Studzinski, Reading to Live, 194.
212 Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1177 and 2708.
214 Studzinski, Reading to Live, 200.
willingness to submit to the text and let it completely shape his or her life. For it to become a spiritually formative and transformative reading, *lectio divina* requires a life of listening. It demands an ear attuned to the message of God and tuning out noise, both interior and exterior. It asks for a life lived with humility.\(^\text{215}\)

7. Sacred Reading and Spiritual Formation in Marriage and Family

More than any other arenas of life, marriage and family are in need of a life of listening, a type of listening that is in tune with the totality of life. Those who live married life first need to attend to themselves. Then they need to pay attention to others, those close to them: their spouses, children, and neighbors. And then they need to hearken to nature of which they are a part. Ultimately, they need to listen to God, the Creator. They do not live by bread alone, but “by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). They need a life of prayer because couples that pray together are happier.\(^\text{216}\)

Prayer is about entering into union with God, specifically about enjoying that union and about encountering the love of God. Prayer is a way of receiving God through his Word. In prayer, we encounter this specific exchange of divine and human love. Prayer is an encounter with being beloved. The first act of the beloved is resting in the love received from the lover. After our encounter with the love of God, we love ourselves. This love of self comes even before the love we have for others. The Gospels make this quite clear: the model for neighbor love is love of self; we are to love the neighbor as ourselves (Mk 12:31). The love of God makes possible the love of self, and these together make possible the love of neighbor. We learn in

\(^{215}\) Ibid., 215.

prayer and from the Gospel how much God wants us to love one another, and God in prayer and in life becomes the guarantor of that love.

God loved us so much that he gave his only Son so that we might not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The Son is the Word.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race (Jn 1:1-4).

The Word is the spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God. The Word was there at creation, and at the moment of Jesus’ conception “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). He is not too far away. Indeed, he is dwelling within and among us, and the root of our being is in him. Only through him we have life, and only in union with him we have love and be loved.

Why Lectio Divina?

Lectio divina or sacred reading of the Scriptures is a spiritual practice for spiritual formation. It is a way of prayer designed to help us realize the Word. The Word was already here and the Word is always present. The Light always shines, but we often do not see and feel his presence because we are not aware of him, or deny him and choose to remain in darkness. To have life, we must let the Light shine through us; we must let the Word run his course, which gives us life. The Word would break the shell, the crust, which keeps us insulated and resistant to change. The Word has the power to do so because “the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow,
and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart” (Heb 4:12). We must remain open and humbly listen and listen consciously and attentively. We must pay close attention to the Word.

In prayer we talk to God and in Scriptures God talks to us. Most of the time we long for God to speak to us but we do not hear him. Lectio divina is a method of prayer that assists us to hear God when God speaks to us through his Word. The process from hearing the Word of God to reflecting upon it, praying with it, and then adapting it to our life leads us deeper and deeper into a longed-for union with God. Lectio divina will help to bring about this intimate relationship between God and humans—the relationship that I believe can be effectively promoted between two spouses.

Michael and Norrisey in Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types comment positively on the common use of this ancient type of prayer by Christians. The reason is, they claim, “it employs all four psychological functions and therefore is an ideal form of prayer for all the different types and temperaments of personality.” They find this type of prayer suitable to all. Furthermore, they find the four types of psychological functions—sensing, intuition, thinking, and feeling—correspondent to the four steps to lectio divina—lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio.

(1) Lectio uses the Senses either in spiritual reading or in perceiving the works of the Lord. (2) Meditatio uses the psychological function of Thinking (the intellect) to reflect upon the insights presented in Lectio. (3) Oratio calls forth one’s Feeling Function to personalize the new insights so that one may enter into a personal dialogue or communication with God. (4) Finally, in Contemplatio one’s Intuition is used in order to coalesce the experience of the previous three steps.

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218 Michael, Prayer and Temperament, 32.
These steps if done properly would bring gifts of peace, joy, and love—gifts of the mystical union with God. If this type of prayer is appropriate for all types of personality, it can be the most suitable prayer for married couples who live in households with more than one personality type.

Spiritual Formation and Marriage

Why do married couples need spiritual practice like lectio divina? According to Patrick J. McDonald and Claudette McDonald, a professional marital therapist couple, since marriage is a product of the human need for belonging, “all marriages are flawed….” This is caused by couples’ needs, fears, desires to control, and many other human motivations. The routine of life loaded with constant stresses that couples encounter daily adds more to the complication of marriage. As a result, marriages are filled with complicated emotional entanglement and misunderstandings. Married couples need a type of spirituality that not only can better their relationships but also deepen their intimacy. The McDonalds recommend lectio divina. The problem is it has rarely been introduced, let alone experienced, in marriage and family.

These two marriage and family therapists, who have attempted to test the method of lectio divina with troubled marriage couples, express this concern in their recent book, Marital Spirituality: The Search for the Hidden Ground of Love. In their research, they come across some passing references that prove the benefits of lectio divina on spiritual life. These are praiseworthy, but “what is lacking is an examination of how Lectio Divina influences, forms and

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deepens marital process.”  They indicate that their work, their efforts to blend the practice of *lectio divina* and marital process, is tentative, but they believe the work needs to be done, for it is “a viable approach to marriage enrichment.”

What makes *lectio divina* work in marriage? The McDonalds believe that “it can be applied to marriage.” This professional couple spending most of their days assisting other couples in their search for healthier marriages frequently point their clients toward the benefits that flow from cultivating the practice of *lectio divina*. They have learned that a solid spirituality in marriage brings with it a renewed love of God as well as a deepened intimacy. They believe the positive effects of reading sacred texts together are able to undermine negative aspects in marriage. The effects come in forms of experience of the divine union. Through this union, couples touch and savor the mystery communicated. Its transformative power has the potential to transform the couples and help them to view life differently. As a result, they find themselves feeling, imagining, thinking, and acting in a new way. Their close identification with the Word leads them to the desire to submit to the Word and let the Word shape their lives. The McDonalds are thus confident that the practice of *lectio divina* would make marriage work better.

Their confidence also comes from their own experience with *lectio divina*. Here is what they share:

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221 Ibid.

222 Ibid., 65.


The reading of the scriptures each day (*Lectio Divina*) keeps us grounded in an awareness that God enlivens our love in gentle ways.... If we grow uncertain about direction, we reflect back on the awareness cultivated in our early morning prayer time.... *Lectio Divina* has taught us that marital intimacy is not an end in itself, grounded in an obsessive enterprise to feel good under all circumstances. It is an opening up of love that becomes more life-giving as it matures.... Should we grow uncertain about what the demands of life entail, we bring one another back to the deeper truths of our existence. These redirections are at times gentle, at other times confrontational.... At the end of the day, we measure our efforts to love by comparing them to the gospel ideal. If we fall short, we prompt one another to try harder. If we have grown, we affirm our hard efforts.225

The process of directing and redirecting one another into a spiritual direction that this couple together has experienced mutually but differently is an advantage of marriage. This spirituality is a shared spirituality. It begins with God speaking directly to them and it continues with their honest response to God’s graciousness. It marks the beginning of a lived spirituality, a deepened intimacy. It changes the quality of the marriage life. As the couple becomes aware of the unconditional love of God, they relate and respond to one another in a more compassionate mode. Their marriage thus becomes the most concrete expression of God’s love.

The deepened intimacy results from the interpersonal process as well. Verbal sharing is one way to enter the richness of marital spirituality, but not every deep experience in marriage can be contained in words. The power of presence, attentiveness, and compassion is invaluable. “God speaks to married couples through the penetrating experience of a shared love, yet the richest language of love is often a warm embrace, a spontaneous assurance, or a gesture of solidarity. God becomes visible and real as they learn to understand the subtle language of love.”226

225 Ibid., 30-31.
226 Ibid. p. 33.
As we have seen, the practice of reading the sacred texts gives the couple the quality time to build their spiritual bond that they might not have in their busy lives. *Lectio divina* invites them to begin a search for the deeper love, one that can support and enhance their efforts to develop a genuine intimacy. This is quite a promising adventure that awaits couples who face the challenge of married lives. Once they discover “the hidden ground of love,” which is God who is always dwelling within and among them, and learn how to welcome and cultivate that love in their lives, a deep spiritual relationship between them will develop.

Steps for Practice—the Threefold Methodology

Traditionally, there are four steps in *lectio divina* that were created during the time of Guigo II: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*), and contemplation (*contemplatio*). These steps have been modified to suit the purpose of practice through time. In recent years, the practice of *lectio divina* has been expanded to five moments of prayers: *lectio* (deep listening), *meditatio* (prayerful pondering), *oratio* (speaking to God), *contemplatio* (God speaking to you), and *operatio* (prophetic witnessing). Notice that *oratio* and *contemplatio* are characterized by an intimate exchange of dialogue, and the last moment calls us to witness to what we have heard.

In this program, I adapt the three steps suggested by the McDonalds in their work done with married couples: breathing exercise (preparing oneself to open to God), *lectio divina* (infusing new energy into marriage), and marital process (dialoguing honestly about all matters).

Step One: Breathing Exercise (quieting down)

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Lectio divina is an encounter with God through the reverent and thoughtful reading aloud the Scriptures or sacred texts. The primary goal is to be in union with God, and the way to this union is contemplation where we are simply being in the presence of God and listening to what God wants to tell us. It is important to keep in mind that true contemplation is not about preparing in our mind a message that we want or expect to hear, but about remaining empty waiting on the Word of God in silence. It is not so much by a word that we get the answer, but rather by our silence that unexpectedly and inexplicably reveals to us the voice of God. The condition for us to be filled with God is our self-emptiness. We are like open fields awaiting the rain to come.

In order to prepare for this field, we need to find a quiet space since quiet space is essential to all forms of serious reflection, and then choose a breathing exercise to calm down. We place ourselves in a comfortable position and allow ourselves to be silent. There are different ways to settle down. A simple way is to just breathe and be conscious of our breathing. We can use a little phrase like “Help me to live in your presence” or repeat slowly Psalm 46 while breathing. Or we can use the “Jesus prayer” (Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner). There are several other prayers that can be used to quiet down and to help us become aware of the loving presence of God. Just breathe in the presence of God.

Step Two: Lectio Divina (reading text)

Typically, the passage is short. A reader reads the text attentively, reverently, and slowly. The reader pauses after reading, allowing the hearer to absorb the spirit and content of

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228 “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Psalm 46).
229 McDonald, Marital Spirituality, 170-175.
God’s words. Simply remain open to the power of God’s words and listen while God does the teaching. The reading can be repeated as many times as needed. After the final time, all are invited to share. Sometimes spontaneous prayer follows, sometimes not.

In this program, the chosen scriptural text is read out loud three times, followed each time by a period of silence. The first reading is for the purpose of hearing the word or message that touches the heart. The second reading is for the purpose of “hearing” or “seeing” Christ in the text. Finally, the third reading is for the purpose of experiencing Christ calling us forth into being or doing.

Of course, the primary text to be used is the sacred Scriptures where the truth of God’s revelation is primarily found. But God also reveals his presence in other texts or contexts which can be other books, nature, other people, and the events of divine activities. Thus, lectio can be expanded to reading the stories of our own lives or the works of others. Garvin in her article, “Narrative, Lectio Divina and the Formative Process,” writes: “Just as for centuries the process of lectio divina was practiced using Scripture and the writings of holy women and men, so too the process of lectio divina may be applied to the narratives of our own lives.”

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat reflect on their lives and experiences and suggest a way to read the texts of our lives and of the world around us for sacred meaning:

When we decided to get married in 1969, we realized that books and quotations truly had been lifeshaping for us. In order to honor this during the ceremony, we had our wedding party read us meaningful quotations before we took our vows. This ritual expressed what we had long felt but not really articulated: that reading itself is a spiritual practice which defines us, unites us, and helps us discover the sacred in our everyday life.

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231 Frederic Broussat and Mary Ann Broussat, Spiritual Literacy Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life” (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1998), 15-16.
Experience such as these must be shared in marital spirituality because marital spirituality is shared spirituality. Otherwise, it will remain untouched and will have no effect upon us, and thus our relationships.

Step Three: Marital Process (sharing thoughts)

With the presence of God who is always there to support and guide, this is a good and opportune time to share as honestly as possible. Genuine dialogue (or presence) will help a couple to interpret unexpected events or things that happen in their marriage, realign the relationship if necessary, and renew or recapture the vision of their marriage. The Scriptures reorient them toward a view of marriage that is grounded in the God of love. The McDonalds suggest four questions for marital processing:

1) What does the text say in itself?
2) What is God saying to me personally through this text?
3) What do I want to say to God on the basis of the text?
4) What difference can this text make for how I live my life?232

These questions serve the purpose of initiating, fueling, and sustaining the sharing process. This step is particularly emphasized due to the nature of marital spirituality which requires mutual dialogue. Andrzej Danczak in his experience with the Domestic Church Movement in Poland recognizes the importance of dialogue in the life of the married couple.233 Dialogue is a fundamental dimension of many human activities and thus an essential element of life in the family. It is the pillar of the inner integrity of the couple, and it has a real influence on the life of the whole family. Dialogue is “a means of building the spirituality of a married

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232 McDonald, Marital Spirituality, 184.
William Doherty, a nationally respected family therapist, believes that simple rituals can strengthen family ties, the ties that bind family’s members together through the use of family-specific everyday rituals. Couple ritual is one of the many simple yet effective methods for opening regular channels of communication between husbands and wives. Marital processing is where genuine communication and dialogue occur. It is a type of couple rituals where God becomes the divine therapist who directs and guides couples’ conversations through his words.

The art of lectio divina is to realize the Word within and among us. It has no other goal but being in the presence of God. Our life is from and in the Word, and thus our happiness. That is, it is not about feeling good under all circumstances, but rather about opening up to love that is life-giving and about bringing us to a deeper truth of holiness. Garvin recognizes two “fruits” that have long been associated with the practice of lectio divina: “first, a deepening sense of one’s authentic identity as flowing from an imitate relationship with God; secondly, an understanding of mission as the enactment of God’s vision for all of creation in the here-and-now.” Union with God in contemplation is the final integration.

Contemplation in Action

With the knowledge that family life is a busy life, it seems almost impossible to ask married couples to live a contemplative life as those in the monastic life. In fact, God is everywhere, and family’s members can experience God in the very milieu of its busy life.

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234 Ibid.
touch of God’s grace can be at any moment of life because life is “a sacred adventure”: “Every day we encounter signs that point to the active presence of the Spirit in the world around us.”

We can stay in unity with God in activity. Contemplation can take place in action. *Lectio divina* attests to the essential unity between contemplation and action. This is what some call contemplation in action. We can be active in selfless service of others without focusing on ourselves but on God who is hidden in all of life. It is a type of service that gives rise to our *apophatic* experience of God. Thomas Merton calls a person who is involved in such service a “masked contemplative,” “one whose contemplation is hidden from no one so much as from himself.” He is serving in humble, self-sacrificing labors and still remains in God’s presence all day long without consciously knowing that he is contemplative. Merton’s idea of “masked contemplation” challenges couples to find God in all of life while working and serving in the busyness of marriage and family life.

**Conclusion**

*Lectio divina* when practiced properly guarantees to bring benefits to marriage and family. This art of reading has certainly proved to be fruitful throughout the history of the Church. One of the most powerful testimonies is its formative and transformative nature. It promises to form and transform the self. Though rarely used in married life, *lectio divina* has shown its positive effects on marriage and family through the works of family therapists. It has


become an effective and useful tool to enhance and strengthen marital relationship. It thus needs to be introduced into the project of building domestic church.
CHAPTER 4: MINISTRY PROJECT—A PROGRAM of *LECTIO DIVINA* and MARITAL PROCESS

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“No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration of the pastoral care of the family.”

John Paul II

As a pioneer in the promotion of domestic church, John Paul II clearly and forcefully indicates the preeminent priority of the family: “No plan for organized pastoral work, at any level, must ever fail to take into consideration of the pastoral care of the family.”

Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family because “future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church.”

Young scholars who live and experience the family life in the post-modern world consistently recommend that local churches must help their members reorder their values and remember the “virtues of home.”

Parishes should offer opportunities “to bring spouses or families together to deepen their personal communion or to live out their familial vocation to be disciples of Christ in the world.”

My project was created with these recommendations and advices as the guiding light. It sought to develop a pastoral care for the family. It attempted to bring married couples together with the purpose to strengthen and enhance their relationships. It tried to provide a learning

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240 John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 70.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid., no. 65.
243 Ibid., 197.
environment where couples could reflect on their call to form communities of Christ’s disciples through the practice of *lectio divina*. What follows is a presentation of my project in which I will first introduce the project’s structure, then describe its implementation, and finally analyze its evaluation.

8. Project Structure and Content

**Introductory Session: General Presentation**

The design of this project is structured around the two thematic pillars: to be aware of God’s presence in all of life and to be aware of God’s Word dwelling among and within us. These two themes are constructed on the two foundational concepts: domestic church and *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina* serves as the cornerstone upon which other materials are built and supported. Domestic church is the final edifice, the goal that this project aims to accomplish.

The practice of *lectio divina* is exercised in every consecutive session following the introductory session. To prepare for marital processing, the third step of *lectio divina* in this program, other subjects including contemplative journey, sacramental language, sacramental life, and shared vision are also presented to help couples carry out their spiritual dialogues.

In session one, they learn how to cultivate the divine presence by examining their own basic needs and habits. In session two, they learn how to communicate with what I call the “sacramental” language, a way of seeing their relationship as sacrament. In session three, they learn how to resolve conflicts through sacramental life, especially reconciliation. Finally, in session four, they learn how to build a domestic church with commitment, mission, and shared vision.
In this introductory session, I first challenge them to consider the concept of “holiness” in place of the conventional perception of “happiness” by using this quote:

Happiness is like a butterfly.
The more you chase it, the more it eludes you.
But if you turn your attention to other things,
It comes and sits softly on your shoulder.245

– Henry David Thoreau (emphasis added)

In my perspective, “happiness” is a very misleading concept because there is no one common agreement on what it really is. Thus, it is problematic to pursue it. The word “holiness,” on the other hand, comes from a Greek root meaning “to set apart to God.” It is the very virtue and quality that the Church calls every believer to live. Only God is holy (Mk 10:18) and for us to be holy we have to turn to God, the source of holiness. We cannot choose to be holy on our own, but we can choose to be with God who would transform us and make us holy. St. Paul always insists that it is not because of what we do that we are justified but because of our faith in God through Jesus Christ (Gal 2:16; Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-4:25). Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are considered righteous in God’s eyes by “the righteousness of God” (Rom 3:21-25). If Mr. Thoreau is correct about happiness, then we should turn our attention to the “other thing,” which I believe has to be “holiness,” to be close to God and His goodness. Only God can satisfy us; only God can make us happy.246

I then introduce the concept of domestic church based on the indispensable notion that the family is the basic cell of the society. It is so important that Pope John Paul II says, “The

future of humanity passes by families.”

It is the first and the most important community where, as the U.S. Bishops have it: “the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.” But this concept is not new; it has its roots in the early Church. A brief survey of its development is presented. I particularly emphasize the works of the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council that reintroduced the concept to the Church community. The true revitalization of domestic church, however, did not occur until the publication of John Paul II’s encyclicals and apostolic exhortations that triggered its blossoming in the theological community.

This presentation then asks the question of how we build domestic church. After comparing some significant features of the institutional Church to the domestic church, I offer my perspective on prayer which for me is the most basic and important way in the project of constructing a domestic church. The type of prayer that I specifically and intentionally chose for this project is lectio divina. It is a type of prayer that comprises all three kinds of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. It has been tested, though rarely, in the marriage therapy by professional marital therapists who claimed that its positive effects change the quality of the marriage. It is thus one of the best ways to cultivate the awareness of God and his Word in family life.

Surprisingly, lectio divina has a very interesting association with the concept of happiness. When I did my research and tried to find some quotes on happiness, I discovered another quote from another author who basically says the same thing but gives different advice. Here is the quote: “Happiness is like a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our

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247 John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 86.  
248 U.S Bishops, Follow the Way of Love.  
249 See McDonalds, Marital Spirituality.
grasp, but, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you” (Nathaniel Hawthorne, emphasis added).\(^{250}\) It beautifully describes the same idea as Henry Thoreau’s, but the interesting part of this is that it suggests we need to “sit down quietly.” When we sit down and genuinely listen, we find the real core of our being, the divine presence. St. John of the Cross says, “Silence is God’s first language.” *Lectio divina* is seeking to do just that: to quiet ourselves down so that we can listen to the Word of God in silence, which transforms us and brings us to the presence of God, the ultimate bliss of happiness.

The process of quieting down, listening, and sharing becomes a discipline of marital processing, which serves as the main focus of marriage spirituality in this project. This process moves the participants through the three moments, namely: resting/listening, unloading, and evacuating (Figure 1).\(^ {251}\) What the participants need to know is that the goal of this process is not to think of what they want to hear or plan on what they want to achieve, but simply remain open to God and let the sacred words transform them. Another point that they need to keep in mind is that it is not necessary for each moment to take place at once and be over because this is a circular process. Each moment might repeat itself. What is obvious in *lectio divina* is that the first (resting) and second (listening) moments repeat themselves several times before the third moment (unloading)


\(^{251}\) This diagram was adapted from Thomas Keating’s four “moments” of centering prayer in *Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1996), 77. It has been modified and adjusted.
takes place. When this process is done properly, the result is the uncovering of different layers of our consciousness: ordinary, spiritual, and divine awareness.\(^\text{252}\)

With the goal of being in the presence of God, the above process guides participants into a journey on which they travel through different levels of the human mind: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious.\(^\text{253}\) As they progress through this journey, they are able to unload what sits deep in their subconscious and unconscious levels—memories, fears, and selfish needs—the so-called emotional junk. Once the emotional tantrums are removed and evacuated, they leave room for the dwelling of God. This inward activity is comparable to the three levels of our consciousness. As we move from the surface, the conscious level, to deeper levels, subconscious and unconscious, we advance from the ordinary consciousness to the spiritual and then divine consciousness. It takes practice and discipline to reach the deepest level of consciousness and unfortunately not many have sufficient energy and enough discipline to get there. *Lectio divina* is a discipline, a tool for this significant journey of finding the hidden ground of divine love. When marital processing takes place in this love, in the awareness of the presence of God, conversation and dialogue would probably be more genuine and honest. This shared spirituality will give rise to understanding and healing. This is the ultimate goal of this program.

**Session 1: Contemplative Journey—Basic Needs and Habits**

The focus of this session is the inward journey, one that travels through the three levels of awareness: ordinary, spiritual, and divine awareness. In order to cultivate the divine awareness,

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we must go through the ordinary awareness and sort out all undigested emotional materials that have been suppressed there. Its objective is to discover the basic needs that every person has and how these needs subsequently and unconsciously lead to habits that might ruin relationships. It is important to dig deep into the subconscious and unconscious level of a person’s mind to understand the psychological and mental dynamics of his or her needs. It is so important because the spiritual journey is a journey of self-discovery,\(^{254}\) says Thomas Keating, one of the foremost teachers of contemplative prayer in the Christian world. For him, the encounter with God is also an encounter with one’s true self, the hidden chamber of one’s behavior and personality. The obstacle to this journey is the very human condition:

This is the human condition—to be without the true source of happiness, which is the experience of the presence of God, and to have lost the key to happiness, which is the contemplative dimension of life, the path to the increasing assimilation and enjoyment of God’s presence.\(^{255}\)

That is, in our nature we are naturally unaware of God’s presence, the true source of love, life, and happiness, and thus we are consistently and desperately search for happiness where it cannot possibly be found. What we need is to cultivate an attentive awareness of God in life. This is to live a contemplative life, the key to happiness which we have lost. The problem is we have been looking outside while the key was lost inside ourselves. Inside is where we need to look for it.\(^{256}\)

There are two reasons why the key to happiness is believed to be lost. From the faith perspective, the story of human creation tells us that we lost this key from the beginning when

\(^{254}\) Bourgeault cautions: “I say ‘cautiously’ because Christian theology makes very clear that the human being is not God and that the innermost core of our being is not itself divine.” in Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, 13.


\(^{256}\) Ibid., 10.
Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3). The moment they were conscious of themselves, knowing that they were naked, they hid from God, the source of love and intimacy, which they had enjoyed before. They thus lost the intimate relationship with God, their very source of happiness. God never abandoned them. Indeed, God looked for them but they were too afraid and ashamed to face God. Fear has crept into the human consciousness and they started to blame one another.

This story is our story. The onset of self-consciousness leads us to become self-centered instead of God-centered. When we try to control our lives and refuse God’s help, we lose the very source of happiness and love. We hide from God. We are out of touch with our true selves, and from each other. We begin to blame God, one another, and ourselves because we are not in the right relationship with any. What we have been desperately searching is to satisfy our needs.

The second reason for the belief that we have lost the key is the operation of the unconscious. Keating identifies three basic and essential needs that we all have: security and survival, power and control, affection and esteem. These instinctual needs have been built in us since childhood. When we satisfy a need, we feel pleasure and when we try and fail we feel pain. When experiences in the early childhood are unbearable, they are repressed into the unconscious. Children who are deprived of any of these develop a desperate drive to seek more and more symbols of these basic human needs. Since the presence of God is not there at the age we start to develop self-consciousness, these needs are all we have to build our “programs for

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257 Ibid., 13. Also see William Glasser, Eight Lessons for a Happier Marriage, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 25. Here Glasser identifies five basic needs: Survival, Love and Belonging, Freedom, Fun, and Power, which are similar to the three needs Thomas Keating provides, so they can be summed up into three. These are, says Glasser, encoded in our genetic structure. Every behavior we choose is motivated by one or more of these needs.
happiness. Without the help of reason to modify them, we build our world with ourselves at the center, around which everything else revolves like planets around the sun. As a result, anything that enters our world—another person or event—is judged on the basis of whether it can make us happy.

Marriage without God starts out on the basis of human needs. Each person has his or her own world with himself or herself at the center. We become kings and queens in our world reigning on our own defined thrones. We mistakenly search for partners that we believe can satisfy our needs, to build our dream kingdom, and to make us happy. When they fail to do so, we feel trapped and disappointed. Since there is no experience of God that would have moderated our excessive importance, we sink all of our hope in the pursuit of one or all of these needs. When we get together as couples, we have a good chance to run into conflicts. In Keating’s words, it seems automatic that “when we are not thinking, analyzing, or planning and place ourselves in the presence of God in faith, we open ourselves to the contents of the unconscious.” That is, if God is not the center of our world, we would be. All our activities are done to serve our needs, which would never be satisfied. Unfortunately, we are always reaching out for more, yearning to control our world in despair. As a result, we are unhappy and our marriage is unsatisfactory because of “external control.”

Too often, couples look outside of themselves for happiness. Their efforts are external to the real heart of a marriage. The outward searching leads to what Glasser calls “deadly habits”

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260 Ibid., 16.
261 Ibid., 19.
in marriage. These are criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing. Aware of these deadly factors, Glasser advises couples whom he has worked with to try not to control anything outside because the only person they can change is themselves. Instead, they should consciously make their choice of being supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating. Keating, in a similar way, would encourage them to make an inward spiritual journey to reclaim their true selves.

The three steps of *lectio divina* correspond with the three moments introduced above (Figure 1). These steps serve the purpose of leading participants from breathing exercise, to sacred reading, and finally arrive at marital processing. The marital process in this session seeks to cultivate awareness of the basic human needs and deadly habits. *Lectio divina* assists couples to journey inward in order to discover their own true beings. *Lectio divina* also helps them to leave the outside world without trying to control it and be mindful of the present moment, their own internal world. The promise of marital processing is to bring to the surface the contents of the unconscious and evacuate them by sharing so that room is made available for God.

Session 2: Sacramental Language—Communication and Communication Skills

In session one, we try to understand the psychological dynamics of what is going on inside us while we are doing *lectio divina* by journeying inward. This journey helps us discover the basic needs that preside in the unconscious level of our mind. The progress from resting to unloading and then evacuating in the threefold method of *lectio divina* serves the purpose of bringing these needs to the surface, the conscious level. By doing this, couples are able to deal

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263 Ibid., 33-34.
264 Ibid., 35-36.
with their suppressed emotional materials and reclaim what are called “true selves,” the spiritual
dimensions of being human. Once emotional materials such as fearful motives, secretive desires,
and selfish needs are processed effectively and successfully, they are able to relax, leaving room
for the divine dwelling. Genuine conversation might begin.

In this session, in order to sustain and nurture marital processing, the sharing dialogue, I
direct them to the subject of communication and communication skills. Here I discuss
“sacramental language.” By sacramental language I mean the language of love communicated
through the body, which reveals God. The body is capable of expressing the divine. Through
the human body, the invisible mystery of love is visibly revealed. The most basic and intense
expression of human love is the union of man and woman in the covenant of marriage. The one-
flesh union involves a language of the body, the language that proclaims God as loving and life-
giving. This “communion of persons” reflects the Trinitarian life of God.265

In this view, there is a special mystery in the human body: we are more than ourselves
because God created us in his image and likeness. God said: “Let us make human beings in our
image, after our likeness” (Gn 1:26). God speaking in a plural form is a communion of persons.
God is family, relationship. To be created in God’s image is to be made for communion, family,
relationship. This is the deepest truth of our being: we are a communion of persons.

Created in God’s image and likeness, each person becomes a reflection of God as Jesus is
the perfect revelation of God. We are all symbolic persons: our actions—of affection or
compassion or patience—remind others of God’s presence. In the marriage’s compassion, our

invisible God was made visible. In the marriage’s love, our hidden God became real. This is what it means to say the Church is a sacrament, a symbol of God’s grace and presence in the world. In the same way, when we say the family is the domestic church we mean the family can become a symbol of God’s grace and presence in the world. It is totally false when we assume that the family is too ordinary and sinful or too mundane and secular to manifest Christ’s presence.

Traditionally, the Church has seven official sacraments, special signs or instruments of God’s grace. Through the sacraments (what we see), we stay in touch with God (whom we do not see). We can only communicate to our God, the Creator, through the created, and thus we need the sacraments in and through which we encounter Christ. Yet, these sacramental moments do not exhaust the mystery of God’s presence among and within us because God is omnipresent. God is everywhere. God is always present, always waiting and paying attention to us, always loving and drawing toward us. Every daily experience, no matter how ordinary it might be, can become an instrument of grace.

This is true in the Incarnation, the premier sacramental event. Jesus’ humanity is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace. If the Son of God is consubstantial with the Father in the beginning, he is consubstantial with us through the Incarnation as he became man. As we profess Jesus, the Son of God, became man, we confess that God has entered our flesh and God is incarnate in everything. Now no place is exempt from God’s healing touch. The family is a suitable place for God’s healing to take place.
Session 3: Sacramental Life—Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

Reconciliation during marital processing is a graceful moment for the sacrament of reconciliation to take place. Here spouses confess to each other their deepest thoughts and desires. This is a moment of emptying themselves and pouring everything out to make room for Christ. The act of pouring out can become a crying expression of renewal when true emotions are on display. The experience of self-emptying opens themselves to God and the result is no less than a feeling of true peace.

Reconciliation is absolutely necessary in the family where conflicts seem unavoidable. Differences in needs, goals, values, interests, abilities, et cetera account for much of this discordance. Differences become disagreements when spouses try to satisfy their own needs and interests. When disagreements heat up they become conflicts, which can destroy relationships. At some point, all couples face issues, disagreements, or fights that challenge their calm and their skills. Unfortunately, it is unhealthy for marriage if spouses develop habits of avoiding a confrontation, submerging their identities, or always giving in. They must learn to resolve conflicts and deal with them in a healthy way.

The third and final step in the threefold method of *lectio divina* designed for this program seeks to create a relaxing and peace-filled setting for conflict resolution. Couples are encouraged to share all matters in a respectful manner. Their conversations are reassured by the guidance of the Word of God. Dialogue carried out with sincerity and transparency becomes a guarantee of understanding and satisfaction. Reconciliation entails an interpersonal involvement in
resolution. It has the power to restore a relationship that has been damaged. It builds trust and paves the way to encountering and meeting God.

Outside of the program, couples are encouraged to treat their family meals as models of the Eucharist. The inspiration comes from a passage in chapter 24 of Luke’s Gospel. A disciple named Cleophas and his partner are traveling back home together. They are disappointed because Jesus whom they believe the messiah was arrested, tried, and executed a few days ago. As they are on the road, a stranger approaches and joins their conversation. He goes over the Scriptures and assures them that God’s servants sometimes have to suffer. When evening comes, they invite the stranger to stay with them following their hospitable tradition. While they are eating, the stranger breaks the bread and blesses it. They immediately realize that the stranger is Jesus and at that instant moment he vanishes from their sight. Their hearts are burned with emotion and passion. Though late at night, they are on the road again going back to Jerusalem to tell others they met Jesus.

This is quite a faith journey, a journey of the two disciples who met Jesus on the road through the Scriptures and through their hospitality. They recognize him at their family meal and cannot hold this good news for themselves, so they go out and proclaim it to others. This story depicts something similar to couples attending the program. They read the Scriptures and through Scriptures they encounter Jesus. They listen to God’s Word and reflect on the Christian stories, and they share. They also meet Jesus in every moment of their life through their hospitality to others, through their breaking of bread and sharing meal.
Besides serving food for the body, a family meal can become a sacramental moment where spiritual food is served for soul nourishment and for faith journey. “If one can think of a Christian family as a ‘domestic church,’ one can consider their meal, in some sense, eucharistic.”

The family meal, like the Eucharist, is important because it symbolizes what the family is all about: eating, drinking, sharing, celebrating, etc. “Our food and family meals are meant to be the humble human reflections of the sacred meal of the holy Eucharist, which itself is a reflection of the eternal feast of heaven.”

The family meal may be structured to reflect the Eucharist by incorporating the reading of the Scriptures as part of the meal. This daily ritual is crucial to the health of the family. The meal brings the family together and provides an opportunity for shared talk, celebration, and mission.

Session 4: Domestic Church—Shared Vision: Commitment and Mission

The Christian family is not only like the Church in its sacramental life but also in its institutional sense. The Church as an institution has its own mission. The family as a domestic church needs a mission.

A family’s mission does not have to be a big, formal document, but it needs to be a concrete, practical statement. A mission statement is a summary of what the family sees as its purposes or goals. It is also a set of values that the family commits to practice. It is a tool which guides the family in what they should be doing on a daily basis. It gives the family the sense of direction, which brings confidence that what its members are doing and where they

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266 Rubio, A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family, 43.
267 Mary Perkins, Beginning at Home, 5-7, cited in Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 119.
268 Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, Ch. 4. In this chapter Bourg suggests that we probably do not need a mission statement printed on our stationary; we only need “a sense of mission.” In my own perspective, it is important to have a mission statement written down, so the family can have some tangible thing to follow.
are going are important and on the right path. This mission needs to be shared so that all family members may know what to expect and be expected in their committing roles.

Linda and Richard Eyre, New York Times #1 bestselling authors, once said: “The techniques are not as important as the heart, the methods are not as important as the commitment.”269 A couple might know all kind of skills for making their marriage works: effective communication and conflict resolution skills. What they also need for making their marriage better is commitment. Commitment holds them together. Commitment means they have promised to stay and work it through, not just today but forever. Sometimes, it is simply the commitment to each other that carries a couple through tough times. Commitment is built in the family’s mission.

A real vision and a true mission of the family must be shared among family’s members whose relationships must be carefully attending to with love. In order for a healthy married life to grow and develop, the family’s vision needs to be shared and the mission enhanced. Here, a shared vision is not just a hoped-for goal but values or principles which all members must realize and put into practice at all times in order for the family to be in harmony. A true mission is a combined, unified expression from all family members and of what the family is all about. It is the principle that governs the family life. It is a moving power behind a successful and happy family.

Such a family contains some ideals, goals, or ends by which its mission as a domestic church follows through and moves toward. Like the universal Church, the ultimate goal of the

domestic church is to seek union with God through its daily tasks of service. In Bourg’s own words, it is a “sharing in divine life, which is a life of love.”²⁷⁰ One important task that fits well in the family setting is “religious education,” with which almost all theologians and spiritual authors who write about family life agree. Lawler suggests some other tasks in being a Christian family: “To be a Christian family two things are necessary: hearing the word of God and keeping it, and covenant with God revealed in Jesus and fidelity to that covenant.”²⁷¹

In describing the mission of the domestic church, the U.S. Bishops in Follow the Way of Love give a list of specific beliefs and activities of domestic churches and invite all Christian families to practice them in their families and with others beyond their boundaries. The list includes believing God, forgiving and seeking reconciliation, and praying together.²⁷² These faith commitments and activities might seem hard, but all members of the Church and thus domestic church are called daily to become more faithful disciples of Christ. Christ is the way and the model of every Christian’s life and to follow Christ means living faith not just in the Church but in daily life. Thus, the U.S. bishops challenge all to live Christian faith not just for our own spiritual lives but for all commitments and duties that make up our lives. Today, holiness is not only found in religious settings but also in living out faith in the ordinary tasks of everyday life.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered, 42.
²⁷¹ Lawler, Marriage and the Catholic Church, 201.
²⁷² U.S. Bishops, Follow The Way of Love.
The lack of a sense of purpose many people experience in their family lives even in small daily tasks such as changing diapers, washing dishes, cutting grass, or cleaning the house leads to the lack of a sense of accomplishment or fulfillment. All of these everyday tasks seem never-ending and far from what is most important in life. This probably is the reason why it is so hard to endure. How hard it is to give oneself to something that seems to have so little significance! Like anything else, it takes discipline to endure and the first step of discipline is having a goal in mind. That goal is to follow Christ and be one with God.

9. Project Implementation

This program was designed for 17 couples who were baptized and married within the past five years in the Roman Catholic Church. They were both Vietnamese and American. They came from different parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I as the researcher created a private Facebook page (DminProject/facebook.com) for the couples to share information and form a support group. The primary objective of this program was to guide and direct these newly married couples to enhance and strengthen their spiritual lives and marriages through the practice of *lectio divina* and marital processing. It sought to challenge these couples to build their families as domestic churches, where faith is nurtured and virtues are taught.

This section reports the actual implementation of the project at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The implementing process includes: arrangement for the parish site, publication of the program, registration of participants, and preparation and execution of the program.
Site Arrangement

From the outset of the program, I planned ahead of time and scheduled the facility with the parish’s pastoral minister. The program was scheduled following the availability of the parish’s facility. The parish’s activity center was the place where I hosted the program. It was arranged and prepared to best fit the purpose of the gathering before the program started. Upon agreement, I provided supplies such as a laptop, projector, and microphone for presentations. Other materials like candles for decorations, and foods and waters for refreshments I also purchased in advance. Parish staff, particularly the janitor who worked at night was responsible for the arrangement of tables and chairs before every meeting following my suggestions. All of these were accomplished in cooperation and collaboration between me and the parish’s staff.

Free childcare was also available in the parish’s childcare center for couples who brought their children to the program. I coordinated with the parish’s staff to arrange for volunteers to provide child care. All volunteers met the standards of child and youth protection required by the diocese for safe environment. Once everything was set, the program started. It took place on Wednesday’s evenings beginning in early January and ending in late February, 2013.

Program Publication

The program was advertised in three different ways. Advertisement was first published online. On my Facebook page, I posted important quotes from the Scriptures and the Church’s teachings. I laid out calendars for the purpose of inviting and reminding participants of each meeting session. I also provided helpful links and useful resources, which attending couples might use to benefit their relationships and to generate further discussions. Information about
the program was thus made accessible to the public and was sent to friends and couples via social networks such as email and Facebook.

Second, I made phone calls to invite couples who got married within five years in my own parish. I also designed promotional flyers (see Appendix A) and distributed them at the host parish’s and neighboring parishes’ Sunday masses. The promotional flyer communicated the central focus of the program: domestic church, *lectio divina*, and marital spirituality. It targeted a specific group of audience: newly married couples. It introduced the topics for marital process: contemplative journey, sacramental language, sacramental life, and domestic church. It also appealed to the significance of the family in the Church and society using the popular sayings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI with whom young adults might be able to easily identify. Finally, it addressed the availability of free on-site childcare which would attract couples with children.

The third and last announcement was made via the host parish’s and neighboring parishes’ bulletins. The announcement gave significant details about the program (see Appendix A). Notice that the titles of each individual session emphasized the practical nature of the program and aimed at reassuring participants that the sessions would not be overly personal and intrusive. The time commitment was also defined clearly with dates and times of all five sessions to assist couples make appropriate commitment and adjustment to their busy schedules.

Participant Registration

There were 20 couples registered. One dropped out when it got close to the date the program began due to a personal reason. Two other couples did not come back after the
introductory session because of schedule conflict and a number of other personal ordeals. The final number of couples who participated in this program was 17. Most registered by email or phone call. I as the leader assigned each couple an ID number and contacted them to make a connection and answer questions regarding the content of the program, directions to the parish, and arrangement of babysitting if needed. A profile of the couples was created and kept for records (Table 4 in Appendix I).

Program Preparation and Execution

In this program, as the researcher and leader, I facilitated each group’s meeting. My role was to engage the group in a process of learning to build domestic churches through the practice of *lectio divina*. In order to fulfill this role, I prepared PowerPoint presentations and handouts such as key notes and assessments ahead of time to assist participants’ learning. Once at the parish site, I had the PowerPoint ready, the background music set up, and all the candles as well as foods fixed in place. After leaving the site, I wrote up a reflection on each particular meeting as a report to my director.

The group first met on a Wednesday night (January 9, 2013) from 7:00pm to 8:30pm in the parish’s activity center for an introduction. This introductory session was designed for all the registered couples to get familiar with the program. In this initial meeting, I introduced the concept of domestic church to the attendees and let them know the primary objective of this program: to build their families as domestic churches. I also presented a general introduction to *lectio divina* and its significance in marital spirituality. The participants would learn from this presentation that the use of *lectio divina* in this program was for a practical purpose of igniting
and sustaining marital spirituality in the family. Couples who chose to continue this *lectio* and marital processing program would be divided into two groups for the next four sessions to accommodate their working schedules. One would meet on Wednesday nights and the other on Friday nights of the same week according to the scheduled dates (see Appendix A).

The next four sessions were designed for the couples to engage in *lectio divina* as a large group following three steps. First, they stayed in silence for five minutes, being mindful of the presence of God by using different breathing exercises. Second, they listened to the sacred text. Finally, they meditated on the reading and then shared with their partner at a private station, prepared for each couple. They started marital processing with the four provided questions (see Appendix D). These questions would help fuel and sustain their conversations and dialogues. To supplement and effectuate their sharing, they were instructed to follow the five rules for effective communication (Table 1), which I would discuss in session two. They were also encouraged to share their reflections with the large group afterward.

A typical session consisted of one and a half hours of presentations and *lectio divina* or scriptural reading and sharing. In each session, the leader facilitated the dynamics of the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Rules for Effective Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use the following five rules to guide your conversation:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Use “I-statements” rather than “You-statements”</strong> (to talk about yourself and your feelings).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Listen attentively without interrupting (but with genuine interest and presence).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Check out what you see and hear before respond (by observing feelings and reflecting back what you heard).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Make your own needs known (in specific terms).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Avoid making judgments, mindreading, and using absolute adverbs.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Couples first gathered and greeted each other. An opening prayer started the evening. After the opening prayer, the leader allowed time for questions and reconnections. This led naturally to a review and presentation of new materials before a short break. The main component of each session was *lectio divina* and marital processing, which would take the longest time of the night. The leader guided the couples through the three suggested steps (see Chapters 3.7 and 4.9). The session closed with Psalm 127. Each session was structured so that couples could engage fully in reading, listening, meditating, and sharing the Scriptures (Appendices B, C, D, E, F, and G).

Scriptural passages were selected with the intention to emphasize the necessity of prayer, enhance marital relationship, and suit the theme of each session. In this program, *lectio divina* always started with Matthew 7:21, 24-27. Jesus in this passage taught married couples to build their marital relationships on the foundation of his words, which would withstand the storms of life. Each session ended with Psalm 127:1-2 to remind them the need of God’s blessing and grace. God established their families, and without God they would not succeed and their relationships would not be able to prosper.

Each session of *lectio divina* had its own specified reading text related to its theme. The scriptural passage for session one was Genesis 3:8-13, which speaks of the human condition before and after the fall. The couple’s relationship with God and with each other has changed since their disobedience. Fear led to blame and the result was guilt and shame. Colossians 3:12-17 was used for session two. In this passage, Paul listed the virtues to practice in order to have a new life in Christ. The couples were challenged to “strip off” their old selves, ones with sins and failures, and “clothe” themselves with new selves. Session three read John 13:1-5, 12-15, the
washing of the disciples’ feet, an episode that occurs in John at the place of the narration of the institution of the Eucharist in the synoptic. It was presented as a model of sacrifice, humility, and reconciliation. Finally, session four summed up what it means to be a Christian family, a domestic church, with a passage from Ephesians 5:21-33. These verses stressed the mutually loving relationship between the husband and the wife as a metaphor to the sacramental love between Christ and his bride, the Church. This passage served as a practical guide for a family life where love, not domination, is the rule.

Individual Sessions

The introductory session began with the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, we love you and we want to be with you. We are longing for your loving presence. We believe that you are present here with us at this moment because you promised to be with us whenever we gather in your name (Mt 18:19-20). We pray that by your grace, by the deep working of your Spirit, you would help us to journey together in this program so that we can respond to your call to make our families domestic churches. We pray this in your name. Amen.

As the leader, I took a few moments to welcome everyone and introduce myself to the group. Each couple had a chance to introduce themselves also. I then went over the program’s outline and objectives. I explained the reasons why I chose a group of newly married couples for this experiment. The presentation continued with a brief introduction to the historical background of the concept of “domestic church” (see Chapters 1.1 and 4.8, Appendix C). At this point, the couples took a marriage questionnaire (see Appendix H). I instructed each couple to put the couple’s number on their surveys in compliance with the university’s guidelines of confidentiality.
The second part of this presentation focused on the practice of *lectio divina* and marital processing. First, I explained the significance of *lectio divina* by giving some evidence of its positive effects and benefits witnessed by monastic people in the past and marital therapists in the present (see Chapter 3.7). It had the power to change the quality of marriage life, if practiced properly. Second, I presented a brief history of *lectio* and the power of reading sacred texts (see Chapters 3.6 and 4.8, Appendix C). I finally ended the presentation with the threefold methods of *lectio divina*. The session closed with Psalm 127.

Session one began with this image: “a doctor’s office.” I the leader invited the couples into prayer by saying:

*Imagine we are seeing a doctor at this moment. Jesus, the Word of God, is the divine physician, and the medicine are the words of the Scriptures. Jesus prepares medications for each one of us. He approaches us, examining us, listening to our hearts. He gives us the appropriate medicine to heal us, to free us from the sickness of sin. So, come now to Jesus; come; come to the heavenly physician.*

I allowed the couples to dwell in this image for a brief moment and then invited them to pray the Lord’s Prayer together. After prayer was the time of questions and reconnections. I then reviewed shortly the materials from the previous session, and moved on to this session’s topic: contemplative journey. I proposed that the inward journey required an investigation of the human mind, and I thus used the mental iceberg to explain the three levels of consciousness: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. I also discussed the three moments of *lectio divina*: resting/listening, unloading, and evaluating (see Figure 1). Notice that the purpose of this process was for the couples to be aware of what was sitting in the subconscious and unconscious levels of the mind. As the couples progressed through these moments, they would be able to
bring the materials in the unconscious to the conscious level and evacuate them. These materials could be their needs, habits, and fears (see “Key Notes” in Appendix D). At this point, I handed out a package of daily readings for practice at home.

After the break, I instructed them to practice the three steps of lectio divina. First, they had to sit in a position that I suggested: Sit straight up facing each other; eyes closed; hands held; feet rested flatly on the floor; every muscle completely relaxed (Figure 2). Second, they exercised breathing: take a deep breath and exhale slowly, following and focusing on the breathing; repeat several times. In this particular session, the couples learned to exercise resting and listening by using the “Jesus prayer”: Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner! They repeated this phrase several times while slowly inhaling and exhaling. Third, I assigned one couple to do the reading for each session. The leading couple read and everyone listened to the chosen passage (Gn 3:8-13), following the sound of the prayer bowl. Lastly, they were directed to go to their private stations prepared in advance for dialogue (marital processing) using the four provided questions (see “Key Notes” in Appendix D).

When they were comfortable with the techniques, lectio divina began. The leading couple read Matthew 7:21, 24-27 and then paused in silence while everyone was doing a breathing exercise. Upon hearing the sound of the prayer bowl, the leading couple read a chosen passage from Genesis 3: 8-13 slowly and reverently. After reading three times, music played softly in the background, and they moved to their private stations for marital processing. In this
session, they shared their needs, fears, and habits to one another. When the music stopped, they came back to the large group for further sharing.

During group sharing, one participant shared that she was able to be aware of the fears that she had since her childhood. These were actually factors that have driven her actions and behaviors. Now, she was able to bring them up, unload, and evacuate them. Another person shared that he had not had a close relationship with God for a long time. He always used the excuse that it was because of work that he did not pray. Now, he found himself praying and sharing with his wife. “It is so special,” he said, thinking that he saw the importance of prayer now. He said he would try to welcome God into his family. The sharing brought the session to an end with Psalm 127.

In session two, I the leader began by asking the couples to open themselves to God in prayer, settling in the loving presence of God and seeking the fullness of God’s purposes in their lives through the words of the Scriptures. I then invited them to join in prayer:

\[O \text{ God, we rejoice that this time we come together in this session and are set within the deeper context of your presence, your purpose, and your power. We want to open ourselves to whatever you want to do with us. Open us up at the deepest levels of our beings so that we might be aware of the touches of your grace upon our lives, that we may be responsive and receptive to your will. As we begin to consider ways of coming to the Scriptures, may your living Word challenge and transform us to become the words you speak in our lives. God, help us to remain open to the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Amen.}\]

After the prayer, I paused for a moment for reflections and examinations. If there was any question or comment, I would address it accordingly. To stimulate a thoughtful connection between the previous and current sessions, I reviewed the materials presented last time and handed out a little survey, an investigation on the couples’ personal beliefs (Appendix H). This
survey would help me, the facilitator, know where they stand in their faith. This activity would bridge to this session’s subject: sacramental language. To speak in a sacramental language means to communicate with the language of love. To help couples understand this topic, I presented to them the theology of the body (see Chapter 4.8), and challenged them to communicate on a deeper level, to see their bodies as sacraments of love. I persistently insisted that for communication to be effective, they must be genuinely honest and respectful in dialogue during marital processing. With honesty and transparency, they would learn to know themselves and their spouses through self-disclosure, self-discovery, and others’ feedbacks. I also told them that if they believed they are the reflections of God and that God is always present, loving and drawing toward us, they would respect their spouses and see their families as sacraments where God’s love is revealed. They would appreciate the presence of God in the world and thus celebrate the liturgy of the world in every moment of their lives (see Chapter 4.8).

After a few minutes of break to absorb the presented information, lectio divina began. They followed the same procedure given in session one except for the session’s reading passage (Col 3:12-17) and the marital processing topic. In this session, they made self-disclosure and asked their partners for feedback. This process enlivened the couples with wonderful insights. One participant shared what came to her during the process. It was the word “forgiveness” which she associated with the sacrament of reconciliation. She brought it up during marital processing when she dialogued with her husband. She felt that it was important to forgive and reconcile in relationships, and it was even better when she was able to do it with her husband. I
affirmed her enlightening sharing and recognized her wonderful inspiration. I also related what she shared with what we would study in the next session, the sacramental life.

Session three started with the leader’s invitation to prayer: Let us take a few moments, as we begin this session, to collect ourselves in the presence of God and open our hearts, our minds, and our souls to whatever God wants to speak to us. Let us be still in God’s presence and be open to the Word of God. The leader proceeded with Genesis 32: 24-31 and then concluded with this prayer:

_O God, once again we turn to you. We come to you in our incompleteness that you might complete us. We come to you in our brokenness that you might make us whole. We come to you in our sickness that you might heal us. Help us to open ourselves to you so that we may learn to let you work in us through your sacraments. Stir our hearts, stimulate our minds, have your way with us. May our compassionate efforts and good will lead us to reconciliation with you and with one another. Amen._

To remind the couples about the significance of the sacramental dimensions of the Catholic faith, I revisited the sacramental value of the human body as discussed in the previous session. I reminded them that many of us struggled with the vocation of marriage because we have not learned to appreciate the sacramental value of our bodies, and we have not learned to appreciate the fact that we love God whom we do not see by loving members of our families whom we do see. With that note, I brought them to another subject, another opening to awareness. In this session, they would experiment with how to live their family meal as the Eucharist and how to carry out a conflict resolution as a Sacrament of Reconciliation (see Chapter 4.8). I emphasized that it took discipline to live out these essential sacraments and that they sometimes had to treat their family life as if it were an ascetic discipline. Since reconciliation was the main focus of this particular session, and in order for couples to learn how
to deal with conflicts, I used the Thomas-Kilman Instrument\textsuperscript{275} to assist them in discovering their own styles in conflict resolution. This instrument helped them to realize the goal of conflict resolution does not stop at compromising but collaboration where true reconciliation takes place.

When they were comfortable with their styles and skills, they were ready for \textit{lectio divina}. As usual, one couple would lead the reading. In this session, they read a chosen passage from John 13:1-5, 12-15 and shared at their private stations. For marital processing, I asked them to concentrate on conflict resolution and reconciliation. During the group sharing, I shared with them the image of “the feet” that moved me. What touched me was the feeling of being washed. It taught me that even the smallest thing that I did for my partner could bring her joy and good feelings.

Likewise, a husband shared that “the feet” were also the image he received from the passage. The feet were the lowest parts of the body, he said, and they could be the dirtiest parts because they touched the ground. They, however, were the parts that supported the body and kept it standing tall so we could see the world and enjoy its beauty. He then referred to his wife saying that sometimes he did not pay attention to her, thinking that her thought and opinion were not important because her logic was so dull. At times, he just hated her crazy personality. But today he realized that she had been patiently enduring him so he could stand tall, so the marriage could survive. If she did not, he said, he might not have stood tall but fallen miserably because

\textsuperscript{275} The Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is a conflict style inventory created by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann in the early 1970s. The TKI measures a person’s behavioral choices in conflict situations based on the five conflict-handling modes: competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating. Taking the TKI helps the couples learn which conflict-handling mode they usually use so that they can work with each other more effectively in conflict resolution.
their relationship would have failed. This deep sharing was a nice and warm close of the evening.

In the last session, session fourth, I the leader began by asking the couples to take a few moments to refocus their lives, their attention to God.

Almighty God, we thank you for the ways in which you have been guiding us, the ways in which you have been breaking into what we thought were safe and secure in our lives and opening us up to new depths and new ways of life and holiness. We thank you that we have another opportunity now to open ourselves to your transforming touch. Help us, O God, to make our commitments and recommit ourselves to you and to our spouses. Help us to say yes to you and your will in our married lives. Help us to say yes to your guidance so that we may build our families as holy families and as domestic churches. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

I paused a moment for thoughts and comments and then proceeded with the session’s focus: shared vision, mission, and commitment. Before presenting any new materials, I asked the couples to use a provided blank sheet of paper found on their tables to answer, with no discussion, the question: “What is the purpose/goal of your family?” Once everyone was finished, I instructed them to share their answers with their spouses to see if any couple had the same goal. This activity served as a jump start for the session, which focused on mission and commitment.

I invited the couples to once again reconsider the task of building their families as domestic churches. I first presented the value of commitment and mission and then suggested ways to write a family mission statement. The process of formalizing this statement followed the three steps created by Stephen Covey: (1) explore what your family is all about, (2) write your
family mission statement, and (3) stay on course. It should be written as if it were timeless. It should include the desired characteristics of the home and the desired effects on family members. The finalized mission statement should be used for the family to stay on track.

For lectio divina, one couple would lead the reading, and as usual they started with Matthew 7:21, 24-27. In this session, they read Ephesians 5:21-33, and shared their commitments to one another and examined their family’s mission. The session ended with online marriage assessments and final evaluations (see Appendix K). These instruments and tools helped measure each couple’s progress throughout this spiritual practice.

10. Project Evaluation

To measure the effectiveness and significance of the program, participants were asked to evaluate their own married and spiritual lives as well as the candidate and the program itself. First, participants were instructed to take a pre-program marriage assessment (“Relationship Health Profile Test”) online to measure the health of their marriages and then bring their scores to the introductory session. They were also asked to answer a short marriage questionnaire at this first meeting to determine their families’ spiritual lives. A retake of the same marriage assessment at the final session would measure the impact of lectio divina and marital process by underscoring any significant change in their marriages. Post-program evaluations included program and candidate evaluations.

In this section, I will first discuss the result of the little survey conducted during session two and the marriage questionnaire conducted in the introductory session. Second, I will analyze

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the data collected from the marriage assessment by comparing the pre-program and post-program results. The outcome will lead me to my conclusion on the impact of *lectio divina* and marital processing on marriage and family life. Finally, I will report the results of the program and candidate evaluations. The final findings will determine the significance of this program.

A Little Survey

Out of 34 participants (17 couples), only one person said that family is too ordinary and sinful to manifest Christ’s presence. Four people said it is false that we communicate with God, the Creator, only through the created; one person was uncertain about this question. One person did not believe that Jesus’ humanity is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace. All participants (100%) believed that each person is created in God’s image and likeness, and that God is omnipresent and his grace is pervasive. This result indicates that the belief that God is everywhere is widely held by all (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Each person is created in God’s image and likeness.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God is omnipresent and his grace is pervasive.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jesus’ humanity is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We communicate with God, the Creator, through the created.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family is too ordinary and sinful to manifest Christ’s presence.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage Questionnaire

The marriage questionnaire serves the purpose of identifying areas for growth and improvement. It invited each couple to note any questions they answered “NO” and challenged them to make commitment for growth during their participation in the program. Table 4 shows the number of each participant’s response (see Appendix I). Based on the number of “NO”
answers before the program, there were at least eight areas that needed attention. These included prayer in their daily routine, reading the Bible regularly, praying together regularly, time for fun and relaxation, priority of marriage, needs to be met every day, quiet time with God, and awareness of Jesus’ presence in marriage. If these areas had an important impact on their relationships, then this program sought to provide an opportunity for them to grow in their relationships. The data indicate a significant change at the end of the program.

Marriage Assessment

The relationship health profile test is adapted to measure the health of the couples’ relationships. If the overall score is above 32, it is likely that the relationship is in extreme danger of failing. If the total score is between 20 and 32, then the relationship is seriously troubled. If the total score is between 12 and 19, then the relationship is probably about average and certainly needs work. Finally, if the score is below 11, then the relationship is well above the norm and may have isolated areas in which it can be improved.

Data collected from the pre-program and post-program marriage assessment documents a statistically significant change. There are three couples (17.6%) whose pre-program average scores were in the range between 20 and 32. It means their relationships were seriously troubled before the program. Their post-program average scores were between 12 and 20. This result indicates that there is a significant change in these couples at the end of the program (see Appendix J).
Average scores of other couples (82.4%) were below 11 before the program and their post-program scores were much lower (see Table 3 and Figure 3 in Appendix J). The total average score of all seventeen couples reflected the change from 8.8 to 5.1. This is a positive improvement of 58.0%. Interestingly, the scores of the husband and the wife did not relate closely. The husband or the wife could have a totally different score from his or her spouse. This suggests that the level of satisfaction in marriage might be different between spouses.

Candidate and Program Evaluations

These two forms of evaluations were created on surveymonkey.com and those participants who had access to Facebook would complete the online evaluations, and those who did not, evaluated the candidate and the program manually (see Appendix K).

The participants were asked to rate the presenter/researcher at the end of the program. In the scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 = not good at all and 5 = excellent), 23 out of 34 participants (67.6%) gave the presenter a score of 5, which is excellent. 73.5% said the presenter was extremely prepared and 64.7% extremely knowledgeable. 50.0% said the presenter answered questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple #</th>
<th>Pre-program</th>
<th>Post-program</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Total average scores from pre-program and post-program marriage assessment
extremely well. 55.9% said the researcher presented the material very clearly. The researcher gave about the right amount of detail (94.1%) and about the right amount of time (85.3%).

When asked to describe the candidate’s greatest weaknesses as a spiritual leader, 16 out of 34 participants (47.1%) skipped this question. Those who chose to respond saw two major weaknesses. First, the candidate’s accent sometimes made it difficult to understand, they said, but he could be understood given time to get used to it. The second area of weakness was the ability to facilitate active discussion and to get participants to be involved in the material. This could be because of the time restraints and the nature of the program. Some said it was not easy for them to share about their marriage and family in front of a group of people. For improvement, they suggested asking questions that would prompt or encourage talking and sharing among the couples, including direct and specific questions that may help couples to open up to each other more. These are areas for improvement in the future.

When asked to describe the candidate’s greatest strengths as a spiritual leader, 8 out of 34 participants (23.5%) skipped the questions. Responses were overwhelmingly positive. The candidate was patient, genuine, passionate, knowledgeable, and very enthusiastic about the topic. He knew the materials he presented and was very committed to his work. Here are some other comments:

- He has a firm/strong belief in what he is teaching and is very effective at conveying his passion for this.
- The obvious desire to know and follow Christ and his commitment to the idea of family was very impressive. Also the willingness to share personal stories about his family’s journey.
- His personal love for Christ, the Church, family and marriage.
- He is very sincere and appears to care a great deal about this process.
• Extremely knowledgeable on material and actually lives by what is presented. Explained exceptionally the good and bad sides to the course material which allowed the participants to understand much better.
• The ability to share vision was great.
• The candidate’s greatest strengths as a spiritual leader were he led by example, his faith led him to be able to connect with us, the Holy Spirit was working through him, etc.

This evaluation suggests that there was a high level of comfort and trust in the ability and competence of the candidate as a spiritual leader (see Appendix K for more comments).

The participants were also asked to evaluate the program. 58.8% (20/34) said the program was very organized and it very well met its objectives. The information presented at the program was extremely useful for half of the participants (50.0%) and at least somewhat useful for three of them (8.8%). The program length was about right (82.3%) and they felt very comfortable practicing *lectio divina* (58.8%). It was better than what they expected and it helped improve their relationships a great deal (47.1%). Overall, they were extremely satisfied with the program (58.8%) (see Appendix K).

Interestingly, almost all participants did not know the practice of *lectio divina* (79.4%) and about half of them were unaware of the idea of domestic church before this program. All of them believed that they could actualize their families as domestic churches and that the practice of *lectio divina* was appropriate and possible in marriage and family life. They believed that building their families as domestic churches would make them stronger and marital processing helped their relationships tremendously. One significant improvement was: 94.1% reported that they were more aware of God’s presence in their families at the end of the program. This proves that the main objective of the program was met.
Suggestions for Improvement

Several limitations of this program should also be acknowledged. First, time was a crucial factor in determining the success of the program. The issue of group discussion was probably related to the lack of time at the end of each session for only a short period of time was given for big group sharing. Some suggested allowing more time for participation during presentation and for more practice. One person suggested having discussion questions prepared to force more communication and dialogue among the couples: “While this is a journey for each couple, other couples can provide advice/insight/sharing that can aid each other. It is difficult for couples to share with each other, but maybe some direct/specific discussion questions might help prompt sharing of thoughts/experiences.” Future projects might need to take some of these suggestions in consideration.

Second, my marriage assessment and survey relied on the responses of one partner to report on couples’ spirituality and relationship quality. It would be helpful to have responses from both individuals and their spouses or partners, as well as observational data on interaction and conflict resolution styles during marital processing. This would enhance confidence that sources of bias related to the method of data collection did not influence my findings. Finally, there was no control and observation outside of the group meetings. Perhaps, couples did not persistently commit to practice *lectio divina* on the daily basis. The result of the post-program marriage questionnaire on which most reported no regular reading of the Bible implied the inconsistency of this practice at home. This report suggested that there was a difficulty in keeping up with *lectio divina* in the family setting. One possible reason could be either parenting
or working duties and responsibilities. Human errors and other factors should be carefully examined in any future study.

Despite these limitations, this program has made an original contribution to ministry in many different ways. Couples were introduced to the concept of domestic church and *lectio divina* and encouraged to view their families as domestic churches whose mission and vision would strengthen their relationships. They were provided an opportunity to examine and improve their individual spiritual lives as well as their lives together as married couples. Here is what they had to say:

- This program has helped us stay committed to praying daily together and will continue in the future with this or other prayer methods together.
- Great program to help family
- It was helpful to me to be presented with an idea of what praying together even looks like. We do have a prayer life together but I haven’t gotten super comfortable with how that plays out…e.g. holding hands, being quiet, breathing, repetition, & listening. Also the weekly reminder was helpful! I feel like there are more and more young couples who desire to have a prayerful marriage but didn’t exactly grow up with a feasible model to follow growing up. Thanks!
- This program was helpful in getting into the habit of reading the Bible together and discussing how we can apply it to our family life.
- This study program has helped my husband and me immensely! We have grown in our communication skills, our honesty with one another, & in our faith walk with God. I feel that we have developed a greater awareness of God’s presence in & with one another/our marriage. Attending this class has been a blessing in my relationship & interactions with my husband as well as others.
- My mother will say, “Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of God.” Learning to hear the voice of God by knowing his word with your spouse is a powerful experience. My spouse can become a great sign of God’s presence in my life through the eyes of faith. *Lectio Divina* is a powerful practice in marriage. It cooperates with the very nature of marriage.
- Great opportunity to bring scripture into our family—when we can actually find time to do it.
Other Comments

There were other comments, suggestions, and inspirations that I received throughout the program. These came from the result of online dialogue on my Facebook page or one-on-one interactions with the couples. Some of these were very inspiring and encouraging. For example, a day after session one, a person shared:

Yesterday’s session was great! I found it interesting about the 3 needs that all people have: belonging, security, and what was the last one? Perhaps it would be a good idea to have a handout with the key points for us to keep? I kept feeling the urge to take notes while you were speaking. Tonight will be Day 1 for our Lectio Divina. I’m sure it will feel silly at first and there will undoubtedly be giggles, but we will try to stick with it. I think the hardest part will arise when we are mad at each and don’t feel the desire to sit in front of each other, let alone hold each other’s hands. That will be the tough part. Also, when I go back to work, we will also be fighting exhaustion and workload. So we shall see! I definitely like the fact that this is forcing us to really make time for each other. All too often we sit together on the couch, but one person is watching tv and the other person is surfing on the ipad. This does not allow us to give our full attention to one another. Also, I think the holding hands part is great! I can’t remember the last time we felt silly and giggly holding hands and playing footsie under the chair. Feels like a new beginning!

Still another commented:

[My husband] said that he was glad we prayed yesterday. He said we welcomed God into our home. It’s sad to admit, but we don’t pray together as a family, so I am really glad we are doing this experiment. You would think of all people, I should know the importance of praying! In one of our conversations today, he said that we should set goals for this year, both goals for the family and individual goals. And we should help each other achieve them. How great!

When I had a short conversation with some of them at the end of the program, one person said this was a great idea and a great program. He suggested making this program available to both engaged and married couples. He would also recommend presenting this idea to a college or a high school as a course for people to learn and think about their relationships.
Conclusion

The five sessions of *lectio divina* and marital processing have significantly affected the spirituality and relationships of those who participated in the program. The couples journeyed from the unknown ground of *lectio divina* to the awareness of God’s presence in their marriage and family lives. This journey took them from getting familiar with the idea of domestic church to mastering the practice of an old but new technique of prayer. They went from contemplation on their interior lives to understanding the basic language of sacrament and sacramental life. They learned to dialogue and communicate in a more effective way through sharing, prayer, and sacrament. They finally made commitment to better their relationships and wrote their families’ mission statements to guide them toward a brighter future. The program’s final report documented a very promising result.

The findings confirmed and affirmed the thesis that by doing *lectio divina* and exercising marital processing the participants would become more aware of God’s presence. The majority realized Jesus’ presence in their marriages and families and believed that their families were not too ordinary or too sinful to manifest the divine presence. They committed to pray more regularly together and agreed that *lectio divina* was appropriate for married life. The program significantly impacted their relationships in a variety of ways. One of the most significant of these was the improvement of their relationships. This could be seen clearly in their testimonies and comments at the end of the program.

The idea of the family as domestic church, however, was clearly undeveloped, if not unknown, in many of the participants in this study prior to the program. Though they believed
that they could actualize their families as domestic churches at the end of the program, there seemed to be some serious obstacles in living it out. Couples admitted its difficulty and often found themselves living out a day to day reality that was little different from other families. From my observation the ideal of seeing the active Catholic family as a tangible expression of the domestic church and the body of Christ is a long way from actualization.
CONCLUSION

It is wise to acknowledge the difficulty that family life faces today in terms of finding time to pray together, and the difference between spouses in their faith commitment plays an essential factor. The lofty idea of domestic church, though very appealing, is not easy to realize and actualize, not just in the past but also in the present. Many in this program find it possible but challenging in actualizing the family as the body of Christ in their own thinking, let alone in living it out. If it was due to the dualistic worldviews in the past that the domestic church concept became neglected and forgotten, it is not completely revitalized today because the religious and secular dichotomy is so deeply rooted. The idea of domestic church is not as attractive to the ordinary people as it seemed before.

This ideal will never prevail until married couples truly and honestly see their families as sacraments from which Christ’s presence can manifest. Until they truly consider themselves as disciples of Christ and their family as the community of discipleship, building domestic churches is a long and challenging project to accomplish. This program has succeeded in introducing the concept with hopes that it will be carried on. The program encourages the couples to perceive their families as carriers of the divine covenant set first with Abraham and his family, and then continued with Jesus and his biological family, then his expanded family, the Church. The Christian family as domestic church surely expresses itself from different sacramental and ecclesial characteristics, but this perspective needs to be reminded.

The good news is: this program’s finding confirms the intuition that the Christian family can become a domestic church with the help of the Word of God. The art of reading the
Scripture will bring the formative and transformative power into the family. The practice of *lectio divina* and marital processing helps cultivate the awareness of God’s presence in life and guarantees to bring benefits to marriage and family. Those participating in the program testify that they become more aware of God’s presence than before. The divine presence significantly forms and transforms them and their relationships. The goal of this program, which is to cultivate the awareness of God in married life through the practice of *lectio divina* and marital processing in order to build domestic churches and strengthen marriages, is thus successfully reached.
APPENDIX A

Promotional Flyer

Domestic Church: Marital Process for Couples

Pope Benedict XVI said, "Lectio Divina will bring to the Church a new spiritual springtime." Pope John Paul II claimed, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family." The future of the Church and society depends on your family. Learn how your family can make a difference in the future!

Topics for Marital Process:
- Contemplative Journey: Basic Needs and Habits
- Sacramental Language: Communication and Communication Skills
- Sacramental Life: Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation
- Domestic Church: Commitment and Mission

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL SPIRITUALITY for MARRIED COUPLES

FIVE ENRICHING SESSIONS AT ST. THOMAS MORE'S
JAN. 9 | JAN. 16 | JAN. 30 | FEB. 6 | FEB. 20, 2013
7:00pm — 8:30pm
Study and Experiment with
Mr. Phi C. Le
Catholic University of America Doctoral Candidate

Childcare Available * FREE * Registration Required: call 225-354-5783

131
Mr. Phi C. Le, Catholic University doctoral candidate, will be offering Five enriching sessions for Married Couples that have been married Five Years or Less. The group will meet and study together using the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina as a way to promote the development of domestic church in married life.

**Topics for Marital Spirituality:**
Intro Session (Jan. 9): Domestic Church & Lectio Divina
Session 1 (Jan. 16): Contemplative Journey
Session 2 (Jan. 30): Sacramental Language
Session 3 (Feb. 6): Sacramental Life
Session 4 (Feb. 20): Domestic Church

All five sessions are free and will be held in the Activity Center at the St. Thomas More Church, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.
Free Childcare is available. Registration required: Call Mr. Le at 354-5783 or email 82le@cardinalmail.cua.edu
A TYPICAL SESSION

GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

Couples gather. Announcement or report is made if needed.

In a typical meeting, the couples gather in a small group at the parish facility. The leader decides which way best suits the nature and composition of the group(s).

OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

The leader begins the session with a short prayer. The opening prayer should express the goal and theme of the session. (Usually, the leader chooses a short passage from the Bible to read).

REVIEW and PRESENTATION (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

The leader reviews the previous session and allows time for report and reconnection. Couples may share what they have learned and experienced from the last session or from the practice at home. The leader presents new materials to prepare couples ready for lectio divina.

Handouts/notes are distributed, and pre-program assessments are taken during this time. (Note: post-program surveys and evaluations will be done last in the final session).

BREAK (5 minutes)

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes, or as determined by leader)

The leader guides couples through the three steps of lectio divina. Couples learn to get familiar with different techniques of breathing.

Participants begin by reading Mt 7:21, 24-27 before start step #1.
Step 1: breathing exercise—Different techniques may be used depending on participants’ levels.
Step 2: reading text—A chosen passage is read slowly and reverently at least three times.
Step 3: sharing thought—Each couple share privately at their assigned station.

Group sharing follows afterward if necessary. The leader decides the time for each step.

CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)
Psalm 127: 1-2 is used for prayer at close of session. Couples learn to chant Psalm 127.

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
## INTRO SESSION

### GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

### OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

> Lord Jesus, we love you and we want to be with you. We are longing for your loving presence. We believe that you are present here with us at this moment because you promised to be with us whenever we gather in your name (Mt 18:19-20). We pray that by your grace, by the deep working of your Spirit, you would help us to journey together in this program so that we can respond to your call to make our families domestic churches. We pray this in your name. Amen.

### PRESENTATION: Domestic Church (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

1. Welcome and Self-Introduction
2. PowerPoint presentation: “Spiritual Program for Newly Married Couples—Building Domestic Churches through Lectio Divina”
3. Marriage Assessments (2 Handouts)

### BREAK (5 minutes)

### PRESENTATION: LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes)

1. Prayer in domestic church
2. Why lectio divina?
3. Three steps of lectio divina
   a. Step 1: breathing exercise
   b. Step 2: reading text
   c. Step 3: sharing thought

( NOTE to LEADER: There is no lectio divina in this session! The passage mentioned in the opening prayer is from Mt 18:19-20. Most appeal to this passage to provide an example how Jesus promised to be with the family. With Jesus’ presence in the family where two or three are gathered, it can become a domestic church).

### CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)

Chant Psalm 127: 1-2

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
INTRO NOTES

Roots of the Concept of Domestic Church:
1. The early Church called the Christian family a domestic church or church of the home
   a. St. Paul called the household the church
   b. St. John Chrysostom called the household “a little Church”
   c. St. Augustine asked heads of families to treat their families as churches
2. Gap: This concept of domestic church was forgotten for centuries.
3. Vatican II reintroduced the concept in Lumen Gentium #11.
4. Pope John Paul II (and other popes) truly revitalized the domestic church

History of Lectio Divina:
1. Praying with scriptures comes to the Church from ancient Jewish tradition. Early Christians continued this tradition.
2. Origen was credited for his approach of spiritual reading (lectio divina).
3. Benedict developed a formal rule for communal life including reading and meditating scriptures (lectio divina).
4. Guigo II formalized lectio divina, describing the practice in The Ladder of Monks as a four-runged ladder to heaven.
5. Vatican II revived lectio divina in Dei Verbum.

Steps of Lectio Divina:
1. Lectio (Reading): an attentive, slow recitation of a short passage of scripture
2. Meditatio (Meditation): an effort to understand the passage and apply it to life
3. Oratio (Prayer): engaging or talking with God about the passage
4. Contemplatio (Contemplation): allowing oneself to be absorbed with the words of God

Marital Process:
1. Shared Spirituality
2. Genuine Dialogue/Conversation
3. Spiritual Direction
4. Unloading
APPENDIX D

SESSION I

GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

Imagine we are seeing a doctor at this moment. Jesus, the Word of God, is the divine physician, and the medicine is the words of the Scriptures. Jesus prepares medications for each one of us. He approaches us, examining us, listening to our hearts. He gives us the appropriate medicine to heal us, to free us from the sickness of sin. So, come now to Jesus; come; come to the heavenly physician...

REVIEW and PRESENTATION (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

1. PowerPoint presentation: “Contemplative Journey—Basic Needs and Habits”
2. Freud’s view of the human’s mind: the mental iceberg
3. Three levels of consciousness/awareness
4. Three moments of lectio divina
5. Practice lectio divina

BREAK (5 minutes)

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes, or as determined by leader)

Read Mt 7:21, 24-27
Step 1: breathing exercise—“Jesus Prayer”
Step 2: reading text—Genesis 3:8-13
Step 3: sharing thought—Needs, Habits, Fears...

(NOTE to LEADER: Leader should use different commentaries to understand the passage. Notice the human condition before and after the disobedience. The couple’s relationship with God and with each other has changed. Fear leads to blame. Sin always reveals its evil side once it has been committed and that is when we experience both guilt and shame. Note that while God punishes sin, he does not do so in an arbitrary fashion. The punishment often is the direct consequence of our evil choices and the directions we have taken. Also, note that “to know” in Hebrew is experiential and relational, not only intellectual.)

CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)
Chant Psalm 127: 1-2

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
KEY NOTES

**Basic and Essential Needs:**
1. Security and Survival
2. Power and Control
3. Affection and Esteem (Love and Belonging)
4. Freedom and Fun

**Deadly Habits:**
1. Blaming
2. Criticizing
3. Complaining
4. Nagging

**Caring Habits:**
1. Accepting
2. Trusting and Respecting
3. Encouraging and Supporting
4. Listening and Negotiating

**Questions for Marital Process:**
1. What does the text say in itself?
2. What is God saying to me personally through the text?
3. What do I want to say to God?
4. What difference can this text make for how I live my life in my family?
SESSION II

GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

O God, we rejoice that this time we come together in this session and are set within the deeper context of your presence, your purpose, and your power. We want to open ourselves to whatever you want to do with us. Open us up at the deepest levels of our beings so that we might be aware of the touches of your grace upon our lives, that we may be responsive and receptive to your will. As we begin to consider ways of coming to the Scriptures, may your living Word challenge and transform us to become the words you speak in our lives. God, help us to remain open to the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

REVIEW and PRESENTATION (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

1. Activity: “Little Survey”
3. Theology of the Body
4. Language of Sacrament
5. Domestic Church as Sacrament
6. Liturgy of the World

BREAK (5 minutes)

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes, or as determined by leader)

Read Mt 7:21, 24-27

Step 1: breathing exercise—“Jesus Prayer”
Step 2: reading text—Colossians 3:12-17
Step 3: sharing thought—Make self-disclosure and ask for feedback

(NOTE to LEADER: In this passage, Paul lists the virtues for a new life in Christ. What comes before this passage is Paul’s descriptions of sins and vices. He challenged the follower of Christ to strip off the old selves, ones with sins and failures, and clothe themselves with new selves.)

CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)
Chant Psalm 127: 1-2

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
APPENDIX F

SESSION III

GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

O God, once again we turn to you. We come to you in our incompleteness that you might complete us. We come to you in our brokenness that you might make us whole. We come to you in our sickness that you might heal us. Help us to open ourselves to you so that we may learn to let you work in us through your sacraments. Stir our hearts, stimulate our minds, have your way with us. May our compassionate efforts and good wills lead us to reconciliation with you and with one another. Amen.

REVIEW and PRESENTATION (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

1. PowerPoint presentation: “Sacramental Life—Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation”
2. Family life as an ascetic discipline
3. Family Meal as Eucharist
4. Conflict Resolution as Reconciliation
5. Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument

BREAK (5 minutes)

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes, or as determined by leader)

Read Mt 7:21, 24-27

Step 1: breathing exercise—“Jesus Prayer”
Step 2: reading text—John 13:1-5, 12-15
Step 3: sharing thought—Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

(NOTE to LEADER: Washing of the disciples’ feet is an episode that occurs in John at the place of the narration of the institution of the Eucharist in the synoptic. It is presented as a “model” for his disciples to follow.)

CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)
Chant Psalm 127: 1-2

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
APPENDIX G

SESSION IV

GATHERING and GREETING (5-10 minutes)

OPENING PRAYER (4 minutes)

Almighty God, we thank you for the ways in which you have been guiding us, the ways in which you have been breaking into what we thought were safe and secure in our lives and opening us up to new depths and new ways of life and holiness. We thank you that we have another opportunity now to open ourselves to your transforming touch. Help us, O God, to make our commitments and recommit ourselves to you and to our spouses. Help us to say yes to you and your will in our married lives. Help us to say yes to your guidance so that we may build our families as holy families and as domestic churches. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

REVIEW and PRESENTATION (20-25 minutes, or as determined by leader).

1. Activity: “What is your family’s purpose/goal?”

BREAK (5 minutes)

LECTIO DIVINA and MARITAL PROCESS (30-45 minutes, or as determined by leader)

Read Mt 7:21, 24-27

Step 1: breathing exercise
Step 2: reading text—Ephesians 5:21-33
Step 3: sharing thought—Commitment and Mission

(NOTE to LEADER: Leader should clarify the message in Ephesians 5:21-33, which should be read in its socio-historical context, patriarchal society. The emphasis is on the mutually loving relationship between the husband and the wife as a metaphor to the sacramental love between Christ and his bride, the Church).

Marriage Assessment (retake), Marriage Questionnaire (retake), Candidate/Program Evaluation

CLOSING PRAYER (1 minute)
Chant Psalm 127: 1-2

Total Time for Each Session: 90 minutes
APPENDIX H

Survey—Questionnaire

Little Survey

Answer the following statements according to your own personal belief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Each person is created in God’s image and likeness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God is omnipresent and his grace is pervasive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jesus’ humanity is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We communicate with God, the Creator, through the created.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Family is too ordinary and sinful to manifest Christ’s presence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marriage Questionnaire

This tool is designed to help you learn how you can improve your marriage. Take note of any questions that you answer “NO”. These are areas for growth during the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We made a commitment to stay married no matter what.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We reaffirm this commitment often.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We know our roles in the family and our responsibilities are clear.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We make biblically based decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We include prayer in our daily routine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We read the Bible regularly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. We build our marriage as a sacrament of love.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. We have each other as priority when managing our time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. We pray together regularly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. We obey God’s direction for our marriage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. We often tell each other “I love you”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. We talk about what each person needs to feel loved.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. We have regular time alone for fun and relaxation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. We remind each other that our marriage is 1st priority.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I ask my husband/wife if he/she needs anything from me every day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. We use our quiet time to talk to God about our actions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. We participate in a church family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. We seek supports from our community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. We are aware of Jesus’ presence in our marriage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. We consider our family a team for Jesus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I

Table 4: Registered Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple #</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>7mon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple #</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>8mon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Marriage Questionnaire Scores. Couples take note of any questions that they answer “NO” and make commitment for growth throughout the program. Data collected before and after the program shows significant change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. We made a commitment to stay married no matter what.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We reaffirm this commitment often.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We know our roles in the family and our responsibilities are clear.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We make biblically based decisions.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We include prayer in our daily routine.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We read the Bible regularly.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. We build our marriage as a sacrament of love.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. We have each other as priority when managing our time.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. We pray together regularly.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. We obey God’s direction for our marriage.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. We often tell each other “I love you”.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. We talk about what each person needs to feel loved.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. We have regular time alone for fun and relaxation.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. We remind each other that our marriage is 1st priority.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I ask my husband/wife if he/she needs anything from me every day.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. We use our quiet time to talk to God about our actions.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. We participate in a church family.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. We seek supports from our community.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. We are aware of Jesus’ presence in our marriage.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. We consider our family a team for Jesus.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX J

### Marriage Assessment Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple #</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Pre-program</th>
<th>Post-program</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Significant Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<td>06</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Wife</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3: Average marriage assessment scores for each couple at the start and end of the program. The total number of 17 couples (34 participants) took an assessment of 62 questions. Score of 32 or above = extremely unhealthy relationship; score between 20 and 32 = unhealthy relationship; score between 12 and 19 = average relationship; score below 11 = healthy relationship.
APPENDIX K

Post-Program Evaluation Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How organized was the program?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely organized</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very organized</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat organized</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly organized</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all organized</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How well does this program meet its objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely well</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately well</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly well</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all well</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How useful was the information presented at the program?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat useful</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly useful</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all useful</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How much has your relationship improved because of the spiritual practice?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A moderate amount</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How comfortable did you feel practicing <em>lectio divina</em>?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely comfortable</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately comfortable</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly comfortable</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all comfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How appropriate is the spiritual practice of <em>lectio</em> at home?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely appropriate</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Was the program length too long, too short, or about right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly too long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly too short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat too short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much too short</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. Was the program better than what you expected, worse than what you expected, or about what you expected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Much better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About what was expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much worse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. Overall, were you satisfied with the program, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely dissatisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. Were you aware of the idea of domestic church before this program?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11. Do you believe you can actualize your family as domestic church?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12. Do you think building your family as domestic church makes it stronger?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Did you know the practice of *lectio divina* before this program?  
   Yes: 20.6% (7)  
   No: 79.4% (27)  

14. Is it possible to practice *lectio divina* in marriage and family life?  
   Yes: 100.0% (34)  
   No: 0% (0)  

15. Are you now more aware of God’s presence in your family?  
   Yes: 94.1% (32)  
   No: 5.9% (2)  

16. Does marital process help your relationship?  
   Yes: 100.0% (34)  
   No: 0% (0)  

17. Will you continue to practice *lectio divina* in your family?  
   Yes: 100.0% (34)  
   No: 0% (0)  

18. Will you recommend this program to others?  
   Yes: 100.0% (34)  
   No: 0% (0)  

19. Suggestions for improvement:†  
   • A useful program  
   • A little longer to get more practice. Passage selections were good.  
   • None  
   • I would’ve liked a copy of all the evals my husband and I took so that we could compare answers and have a longer discussion period in private  
   • No suggestion  
   • Maybe try some praise and worship music, depend on the couple but music helps lift our spirit to God  
   • I can’t say much because we received a one-on-one process with the presenter due mainly to our different working schedule. We are greatly appreciative for that. For us, it is knowledgeable, spiritual, and practical.  
   • 1) Perhaps allow more time for class participation in lecture. Open dialogue among the participants. It’s interesting as newlyweds to hear what other couples are dealing with during their first years of marriage and how it relates to *lectio divina*. 2) Also, having lectures performed by both man & woman simultaneously is an interesting concept. Enjoyed the lectures provided for pre-Cana (Catholic Life Center) with husband and wife. Overall, a very good program that refocuses the expectations of marriage. And answered the question “We had the wedding…now what?”
I would have liked more discussions. It would be great to have a half day seminar.

Maybe inform attendees to bring pen & paper for note taking. I would have liked to have copies of some of the evaluations so that we may, as a couple, discuss the information.

Marriage counseling can be helpful.

Marriage education

Low light makes me sleepy

Have prepared discussion questions that more force communication between the couples. While this is a journey for each couple, other couples can provide advice/insight/sharing that can aid each other. It is difficult for couples to share with each other, but maybe some direct/specific discussion questions might help prompt sharing of thoughts/experiences.

More group activity for feedback and continued practice. To “network” better with other couples.

A more concise mission statement on the first day of the program. I was not completely sure what the process and its purpose were until second night.

Provide handouts of materials presented in class for review and further study at home.

20. Other comments:

This program has helped us stay committed to praying daily together and will continue in the future with this or other prayer methods together.

Great program to help family

Need to expand the concept and practice of lectio divina. In other words, tell me what it is and show me how to do it: lectio divina 101. Tell, show, practice, and review. A lot of young (even old) marriage couples have an education that falls under the category theology for dummy. The idea of domestic church needs to be explained plainly and simply, down to earth language.

It was helpful to me to be presented with an idea of what praying together even looks like. We do have a prayer life together but I haven’t gotten super comfortable with how that plays out…e.g. holding hands, being quiet, breathing, repetition, & listening. Also the weekly reminder was helpful! I feel like there are more and more young couples who desire to have a prayerful marriage but didn’t exactly grow up with a feasible model to follow growing up. Thanks!

My only concern is that couples would use scripture primarily as a means to sharing. Sharing is necessary, but it cannot replace the primary purpose of scripture: encountering Christ. I think there are some safeguards against this danger in the program, but there could be more. Also, it is important to make sure people know domestic church can never replace the sacraments. You said this in passing, but one of the crises of marriage is the lack of
Great program

This program was helpful in getting into the habit of reading the Bible together and discussing how we can apply it to our family life.

Great program

This study program has helped my husband and I immensely! We have grown in our communication skills, our honesty with one another, & in our faith walk with God. If feel that we have developed a greater awareness of God’s presence in & with one another/our marriage. Attending this class has been a blessing in my relationship & interactions with my husband as well as others. Thank you Phi!

My mother will say, “Ignorance of scriptures is ignorance of God.” Learning to hear the voice of God by knowing his word with your spouse is a powerful experience. Your spouse can become a great sign of God’s presence in your life through they eyes of faith. Lectio Divina is a powerful practice in marriage. It cooperates with the very nature of marriage.

Great opportunity to bring scripture into our family—when we can actually find to do it.

Enjoyed doing a program like this with my husband

†Question 19 skipped: 15 (44.1%)
††Question 20 skipped: 22 (64.7%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Extremely knowledgeable</th>
<th>Very knowledgeable</th>
<th>Moderately knowledgeable</th>
<th>Slightly knowledgeable</th>
<th>Not at all knowledgeable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22. How knowledgeable was the presenter?</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. How experienced in the subject was the presenter?</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. How well did the presenter answer questions?</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. How clearly did the presenter present the material?</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Did the presenter give too much detail, too little detail, or about the right amount of detail?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Much too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the right amount</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Did the presenter allow too much time for discussion, too little time, or about the right amount of time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Much too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat too much</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slightly too much</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>About the right amount</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Overall, how would you rate the presenter?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly good</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mildly good</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not good at all</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>29. Please describe the candidate’s greatest weaknesses as a spiritual leader.*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Didn’t find any.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engaging the class into discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The first week I had difficulty understanding, but got used to your accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with some time.</td>
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<td>4. Can’t think of one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. None that I can think of.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Not that I know of.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. New and beginner in the field.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. He is weak in facilitating discussion and asking questions that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prompt/encourage talking amongst the couples. Including direct/specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questions may facilitate couples opening up to each other and sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amongst themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Spoke softly, sometimes not dynamic in speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I think there was a slight lack of depth of knowledge about the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in general... (There was definitely a very good foundation). Perhaps,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a slight lack of community outside of the immediate family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. He sometimes was speaking with his back to the audience as he was reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off the screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Accent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. His accent sometimes made it difficult to understand things quickly and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>required him to repeat things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Encouraging participants to be a little more involved in material. The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tests were fantastic and can be used to generate dialogue between the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couples in the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Facilitating active discussion. Time restraints were part of the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. None that I was aware of!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. None observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Hard to understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30. Please describe the candidate’s greatest strengths as a spiritual leader.**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Very knowledgeable and genuine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Very knowledgeable of Scripture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understanding and encouraging the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. His love for Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. He seems to have a deep devotion to the subject matter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Listen, determined, and willing to help.
• Very committed to his work and willing to help.
• He has a firm/strong belief in what he is teaching and is very effective at conveying his passion for this.
• Very knowledgeable, could sense passion in presenter’s voice.
• The obvious desire to know and follow Christ and his commitment to the idea of family was very impressive. Also the willingness to share personal stories about his family’s journey.
• His personal love for Christ, the Church, family and marriage.
• Smiles a lot. Beautiful music. Good room arrangement! Thank you. God be with you.
• Knowledge.
• He is very sincere and appears to care a great deal about this process.
• He shared his personal experiences and was passionate about the topic. He really seemed to care about helping us to use the program to help us improve our marriages.
• Great preparation, organized, great presentation. Great communication skill.
• Extremely knowledgeable on material and actually lives by what is presented. Explained exceptionally the good and bad sides to the course. Material which allowed the participants to understand much better. I always enjoy listening and learning from someone that involves their own experiences and impact on things where they committed themselves to what is being taught. Makes it so much more relatable.
• The ability to share vision was great.
• The candidate’s greatest strengths as a spiritual leader were he led by example, his faith led him to be able to connect with us, the Holy Spirit was working through him, ect.
• Passionate and knowledgeable.
• He knows the materials he presented.
• Patient
• Very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the topic
• Great person
• Very knowledgeable which led to comfort in discussing and defending the material. He’s passionate about what he’s teaching which makes it exciting to learn and implement.
• Strong faith

*Question 29 skipped: 16 (47.1%)
**Question 30 skipped: 8 (23.5%)


