

Session 4 - God's body talk

Preparation before the session

Prayer to Holy Spirit for catechists

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

(*St Augustine*).

Remember our goal is catechesis

(cf. Introduction to *Marriage Preparation Course*):

- Personal and sensitive
- Jesus first and last
- Love the Church
- Seeing the holy

Read through the Presenter's material

- Be clear about the goal and objectives of the session
- Understand and prayerfully read the sections
- Prepare your own answers to the activities to share with the couples.

Session 4 God's body talk

Aim: To appreciate that, being created by the God of love, our bodies reflect their origin in his loving purpose. This purpose informs what is the right and wrong use of our bodies.

Objectives: By the end of this session couples will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love.
- State why contraception and IVF contradict the meaning of marital love.
- State why the marriage vows: unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life are vital to the success of a marriage.
- Explain why the Church advocates Natural Fertility Awareness

Key Features:

- The 'nuptial significance' of maleness and femaleness.
- The Law of Self-gift and the necessary conditions for self-giving.
- How contraception and IVF are a lie.
- Why it is important that sex is open to life.
- Natural Fertility Awareness

Outline of Session	
Section and timing	Brief overview
1. Welcome and recap from last session (10 mins)	Welcome back, ask if any questions Activity: Recap 'highlights' from last session Input: Brief overview of session
2. Made in the image of God (30 mins)	Input: How to read the Genesis account Activity: Review passages on creation to determine what they teach us about being made in God's image including input on the Church's teaching
3. What's wrong with contraception and IVF (20 mins)	Activity: True or false. Couples decide if statements are true or false followed by group discussion covering input on what the Church teaches about contraception and IVF
4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God? (15 mins)	Activity: Couples discuss their attitude to having children with each other
5. Closing words and homework (15 mins)	Activity: Session recap quiz Prayer

1. Welcome and recap of the last session

The purpose of this section is to re-engage with the course and prepare for what this session will cover.

Welcome couples back to the course. Ask if anyone has any questions arising since you last met. Explain that to start you are going to complete a quick recap.

Key points: You will want to make the following points:

- During the last session we discussed the important differences between men and women, and the fact that these differences are not accidental or life-style choices, but have their origin in God's purpose for us.
- For the start of this session I'd like you to tell us what you remember about:
 - The importance of these differences to us being made in the image of God. And
 - What marriage has got to do with us being made in the image of God.
- Spend a few minutes discussing what you remember and then we'll discuss them as a group.

The answers to these questions are found at the end of the first activity of session 3, 'Respect the differences between men and women' (See above pp.127-129).

Objectives of today's session

- Last time we talked about the differences between men and women, this session we're going to look more deeply at the purpose behind God creating us either masculine or feminine.
- Then we're going to look at the meaning God has written into sexual love that allows us to speak God's language of love as husband and wife.
- We're also going to look at the reasons why using contraception and IVF contradict and harm the purpose and meaning God has given sexual love.
- We'll also examine why Natural Fertility Awareness is in tune with the God-given meaning of sexual love.

2. Made in the image of God

The purpose of this session is to help the couples think more deeply about God's revelation that our bodies are made in the image of divine love, which is the source of the dignity and value of masculinity and femininity. Once couples accept their bodies have an inherent meaning and purpose they will be more open to the argument that it is reasonable to reject the misguided notion that it is acceptable to use contraception and IVF.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we're going to look further at what God has revealed about our bodies inherent meaning and purpose as male and female, and how this meaning and purpose is expressed in marriage.
- First, we're going to read together a selection of extracts from the Book of Genesis about the creation of the first man and the first woman. Then you'll split into couples and discuss questions about the texts, and finally we'll come together to share our thoughts.
- Before reading the extracts from the Book of Genesis it may help to recap the approach the Catholic Church takes to this section of the Bible.
- The first things to realise is that the authors of Genesis, inspired by God, didn't intend to write a work of history or science as we understand those disciplines today. So when Genesis says God created the world in six days, formed Adam from clay, and made Eve from one of his ribs, the authors are not relating literal historical or scientific facts.
- The *Catechism* makes it clear that the Old Testament accounts of creation go beyond the questions of the natural sciences into the realm of meaning. The purpose of Old Testament accounts of creation is to make profound realities graspable to human beings.

Thus Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of plant life gradually appeared or how the sun and moon and the stars were established. Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: God created the world...all of this comes from one power, from God's eternal Reason, which became – in the Word – the power of creation.

(Cardinal Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning'*, p.5)

- So when we read Genesis today we must ask the questions, 'what profound reality about being men and women is God trying to tell us? What is the divine meaning he has given masculinity and femininity?'

Extracts from the Book of Genesis

- In your pairs, turn to the material on Creation and take 10 minutes to answer the questions together. As a group we will then go through the answers (*Couple's Book* p. 18).

After about 10 minutes come together into the group, and invite couples to share their answers.

You will want to make the following points when discussing the couples' answers. Spend approximately 5 minutes on each question.

First account of creation

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1:26-28)

Second account of creation

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed...

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2: 7-8, 18-25)

1. What do these extracts tell us about human beings being different from animals?

- The references to being made 'in the image of God' and God breathing the 'spirit of life' into Adam's nostrils helps us grasp that we are a union of body and soul.
- The body isn't a machine inhabited by a soul, but an inseparable union of physical body and spiritual soul.
- Our image and likeness to God resides in this spiritual reality, our soul, but our body also shares in the dignity of the 'image of God'. We have human bodies, and not animal bodies, because they are animated by a spiritual soul created by God.

- Nowadays we don't hear much talk about the soul being the seat of our identity; it's all been reduced to brains and brain chemistry. But the reality of each person having a soul conveys the truth revealed by God that we're made in his image and that he breathes his spirit into us.
- What is a soul? It refers to our interior life, the inner-most aspect of a human being, our self-possession, self-awareness, and self-knowledge. (CCC 362-368).
- In Christianity, the image of the soul is the 'heart', not as the muscle that pumps blood around the body, but as a symbol of the inner depths of the person. The image of the heart expresses the reality of us being a unity of body and soul.
- The importance of the 'heart' in Catholic spirituality is seen in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the wounded heart of Mary. The total, self-giving love of Jesus for sinful human beings is conveyed by the iconography of his divine heart exposed to our gaze and suffering the wounds of our sins not in condemnation or retribution but in the humility of love.
- All these 'heart' images convey an essential truth about why we have souls, why we are persons – so we can enter into relationships with others, so we can love others. The most intense experience of being a 'person', of being a 'soul' is the love you have for each other.
- Also, because we are made in the image and likeness of God, we have been given the capacity to receive God's self-communication, his revelation and his grace. This capacity to have communion with God involves our whole being, body and soul united. This means we cannot treat our bodies in ways that are contrary to God's will, as if they were 'no go' areas for God.

2. What do these extracts tell us about the relationship between men and women?

- One thing it doesn't tell us is that man is superior to woman. The image of Eve being formed from Adam's rib is not about woman's dependence of man but about complementarity, about completing each other through a natural union.
- Genesis says God saw that man was lonely without a helpmate, that he needed another. None of the animals could fill this gap of loneliness. We cannot exist in isolation, we are not self-sufficient. Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.
- In creating human beings, male and female, God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, though in a different and complementary way. And as we discussed in the last session, it is that personal union of masculine and feminine differences in marriage that fully conveys the image of God.

- The phrase, ‘I shall make a helper for man, as a partner for him’, can also be translated as an ‘opposite to him’. This means that God has created men and women to be opposites turned in each other’s direction and specifically made to encounter each other and fit together.
- This personal reality of being created as opposites made to fit together is reflected in the biological structures of male and female bodies. The physical reflects the spiritual, and vice versa.

3. What do these extracts tell us about the purpose and meaning of sexual love?

- God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.
- Reflecting on Genesis, the Church teaches that sexual love expresses in a profound way our nature as beings created to be a union of body and soul, made in the image of God. (*CCC* 2331-2336; 2360-2363).
- The phrases, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ and ‘and they become one flesh’ mean three important things in the Bible:
 - (1) The sexual act between husband and wife creates a bond as close as a blood relationship between members of a family, with the obligation of living together in peace.
 - (2) That husband and wife are complementary and complete each other.
 - (3) The physical, marital union between man and woman forms one shared life as if they are one person.
- Another sentence that’s important to look at is, ‘And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed’. It is this freedom from shame about our nakedness that makes the sincere gift of self possible through the bodiliness of sexual love.
- We came across the term, body language in the last session. You will remember it refers to the fact that our facial expressions, the movements of our body, the gestures we make communicate signals and information about our moods, our feelings, even our thoughts. Our bodies give other people an insight into the inner depths of our personality.
- Sexual love in marriage is an intense and powerful type of body language between husband and wife.
- What does this ‘body language’ of the marital act communicate? It says, ‘You’re the most important person in my life’, ‘I love you so much I give you my body’, ‘Your happiness and pleasure are as important to me as my own’, ‘I want to give you a moment of pleasure and joy after a day of hard work and problems’. The most important and special statement that the body language between wife and

husband makes is, “I love every aspect of you so much that I am open to giving life to a child with you, who will be part of you and part of me”,

- As we discovered in the first session, ‘God is love’ and he created maleness and femaleness as a special way of sharing in his love.
- The naked bodies of husband and wife show that they have been created to communicate the body language of love in a way that intimately expresses the total gift of oneself. Marriage is written into the structure and shape of our bodies.
- This openness of ourselves, physically, psychologically and spiritually, to self-giving is so important it’s called the ‘Law of the Gift’, expressed in this sentence: ‘We can fully discover our true self only in a sincere giving of ourselves.’ (*Gaudium et Spes*)
- The ultimate expression of our self-gift in marriage is the procreation of children, because it is not only a share in God’s creative power, but also expresses the inner life of God, which is a communion of persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When a husband and wife conceive a child they, too, become a communion of persons. This is one of the reasons why marriage must be a deeply held personal union, that is indissoluble, faithful and open to life.

3. What’s wrong with contraception and IVF?

The purpose of this activity is for couples to find out for themselves why the Church teaches that contraception and IVF are wrong and harm marriage. Simply put, there are two reasons: both artificially break the inseparable bond between the act of sexual love and openness to fertility. Further, contraception makes the act of love a ‘lie’ by withholding one of the essential qualities of marriage: openness to fertility.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we’re going to undertake an activity to explore why the Church teaches that contraception and IVF are wrong and have no place in a Catholic marriage.
- If you turn to your *Couple’s Book* (p.19) you’ll see a number of statements giving reasons why the Church teaches that contraception and IVF are wrong. Some of these reasons are false and some are true. We’d like you to sort out the true reasons from the false ones.

After about 5 minutes come back into the group and go through the reasons they have chosen as being true and false and why. Spend a couple of minutes on each statement. Make sure that couples correct their answers if necessary in their material.

Why contraception and IVF are wrong? True or false

(This activity is based on Dr C O'Donnell's *Questions & Answers on Sex and Marriage*)

1. The Church is against contraception because sex is something bad and dirty

- This is false. As we've discussed throughout the Course, God made erotic love because he considers sexual love not only very good, and to be enjoyed, but also because it is one of the most powerful and intimate ways of giving and receiving love between husbands and wives.

2. The Church is against contraception because it wants every act of sexual love to result in a baby

- This is false. The Church understands that 'new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse' due to the woman's God-given, natural cycle of monthly fertility and infertility.
- Furthermore, the Church also teaches that where there are 'well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances' (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*), married couples may then take advantage of Natural Fertility Awareness to abstain from sexual relations during the woman's fertile period, and have sexual intercourse during the infertile period. This does not go against God's will for our fertility because the couple are using the natural, God-given cycles for their correct purpose.
- God, in his wisdom, has given us a natural, simple way of being responsible parents that involves our intelligence, self-control and loving consideration. However, the couple must ensure that their motivation is the good of the family and not some selfish desire.

3. The Church is against contraception because it makes a lie out of God's language of love

- This is true. As we've seen in this session God created masculinity and femininity to enable husbands and wives to express mutual self-giving and receiving in love. Fertility is not an optional extra but a fundamental dimension of maleness and femaleness. Recognising this, the essential signs of love in marriage are deeply personal union, indissolubility, faithfulness, and openness to fertility. The problem with artificial contraception – sheath, pill, coil, implant, injection – is that they withhold fertility. It makes the act of sexual love a lie, because the body language is saying, 'I love everything about you except your natural fertility.'

4. The Church is for couples spacing the number of children using Natural Fertility Awareness

- This is true. The Church actively supports scientists and doctors discovering more about the natural periods of fertility and infertility that God has given women in their monthly cycle. This is not to be confused with older, less reliable methods such as the Rhythm Method, but is based on observations of natural changes to the woman's body. The exact details of this technique are outside the scope of this course, but practitioner teachers of the ovulation method or multiple-indicators can be found on the web.

5. The Church allows couples to use Natural Fertility Awareness to permanently avoid pregnancy

- This is false. The Church beseeches couples to avoid having a 'contraceptive mentality' which means using the awareness of the fertile and infertile periods in a woman's cycle to avoid having any further children. This would be an abuse of God's will in creating this natural monthly cycle. The basic purpose of sexual love is the procreation of children, and this should be honoured in marriage. The difference between Natural Fertility Awareness and contraception is that contraception is unnatural and intervenes to artificially suppresses a good and natural function, the couple's fertility.

6. The Church is against IVF because children conceived in a test tube are not really human

- This is false. Every child born through IVF is fully and truly a human being, with a soul created by God. However, the Church believes that every child has the right to be conceived from within the intimate act of self-giving love between wife and husband.

7. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't want the marriage bed to be replaced by the laboratory

- This is true. There is a natural security that comes from reserving conception of human beings within the woman's body. Once this natural security is broken, as it has been with IVF, all kinds of gravely immoral acts follow. For example, experimentation on embryonic human beings, sex selection, eugenics of embryonic human beings with disabilities, and the creation of animal/human hybrids.

8. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't care about the suffering of infertile couples

- This is false. The Church continues to express her deep sympathy, care and recognition of the suffering caused by infertility. In the *Catechism* it states, 'Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.' (CCC 1654). Also, the Church promotes the use of medicine, surgery, and Natural Fertility Awareness for couples suffering from infertility, and sub-fertility, that is, medically unexplained problems conceiving.

4. Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God?

The purpose of this section is to help couples talk about what it means to be open to life, open to share their lives with children. After talking about the tragedy and sadness of contraception, it's good to end this session on the high note of having children.

Key points: Make the following points:

- When you make your marriage vows during your wedding you will make the following promise: Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?
- Turn to the final activity of this session, 'Accepting Children' (*Couple's Book*, p.20), and spend a few minutes, in couples, thinking about the following questions.
 - What do we mean when we say that children are a gift from God?
 - Would you want your children to be brought up in the Catholic faith? Why?

After 5 minutes, when the couples come back to the group, invite them to share any thoughts.

Key points: Make the following points:

- One of the original blessings God gave human beings was the command, 'Be fruitful and multiply'.
- Children are one of the great gifts of life, along with the gift of our own existence and the wonderful gift of love between man and woman. This whole cluster of gifts from God goes together, usually.
- This is what the Church tells us about children: 'A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment... called to give life, spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God... they are co-operating with the love of God the Creator'. (*CCC* 2366-7).
- Having children is taking part in God's creative work; it is the fruitfulness of God's original blessing. Parents become co-operators with the love of God the Creator and in a sense make that love present.
- This is shown in a couple's openness to life, the gift of their whole being – the gift of their fertility – through which they share in God's life-giving love.
- In this way marriage opens up the wonderful and demanding vocation to parenthood, one of the most powerful experiences of our capacity for self-giving love.

5. Closing words and homework

The purpose of this section is to recap the session and to continue to encourage the couples in prayer.

Key points: To explain this section, make the following points:

- Some of the things which we have talked about today can be difficult because they go against current ‘popular public opinion’. It is important that you appreciate the arguments being made because you may face great pressure to use contraception and/or IVF. In these circumstances you will really be called upon to practice self-giving love.
- To help us reflect on what we have learnt today can each of you individually jot down the key points you would make in response to the following questions (*have some paper ready – pause between the questions*):
 - What would you explain as being the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love?
 - Why would you say that contraception contradicts the meaning of marital love?
 - Why would you say that IVF contradicts the meaning of marital love?
 - Why are the marriage vows (unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life) vital to the success of a marriage?
 - Why does the Church advocate Natural Fertility Awareness?
- This exercise that we have done is not at all easy! You will probably need more time to reflect on what we have covered.
- For ‘homework’ read the summary in the *Couple’s Book* (pp.19-20); reflect on the bible passages we have read today and think about “What will we do as a result of this session?”

Check if there are any other questions. Confirm the date, time and location of the next meeting. Thank everyone for coming.