

Session 4 - God's body talk

Preparation before the session

Prayer to the Holy Spirit for evangelisers

Give me the gifts I need in my labour,
A mind that is eager to seek for the truth,
Keen to perceive it and strong to embrace it.
A will that is eager and valiant to do.

Come to my aid when you hear me calling,
Light up the dark, make the rough places plain.
Bring to my mind the unknown and forgotten.
Give me the words that I seek for in vain.
Amen. (*St Thomas Aquinas*)

Remember our goal is evangelisation

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

- Reach out and welcome.
- Proclaim and educate.
- Call and invite to belong.

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.

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.

Session 4 God's body talk

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)	Activity: Quick 'opinion quiz'. Couples review statements followed by group discussion covering input on what the Catholic Church teaches about the dignity and value of having bodies created by God
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.
- Let's start with some of the 'highlights' which you remember from the last session about these differences. Spend a few minutes discussing what you remember and then we'll discuss them as a group.

Objectives of today's session

- Last time we talked about the differences between men and women. This session will look more deeply at the purpose behind God creating us with bodies – 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.
- Finally, we'll 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 get the couples thinking about the dignity and value of having bodies created by God. This is to counter the fashionable idea that we are the products of random chance, and can therefore do whatever we like to our own bodies and other bodies, with their consent. 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 a 'good' thing to use contraception and IVF.

Key points: Make the following points:

- Now we're going to look at what the Catholic Church teaches about the inherent meaning and purpose God has given our bodies as male and female, and how this meaning and purpose is expressed in marriage.

Made in the image of God

- As couples, turn to the material on ‘Made in the image of God’ (*Couple’s Book*, p.17) and take 10 minutes to fill in the questionnaire together. As a group we will then go through the answers.

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

Key points: You will want to make the following points when discussing the couples’ answers. Spend approximately 5 minutes on each statement. The model answers draw on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

1. Humans are just like the other animals, nothing more.

- **God created human beings to be a union of body and soul.** This question is about human beings being created by God as a union of body and soul.
- The answer is ‘Strongly disagree’. The fact that human beings are created as a union of body and soul means the body is never ‘something’ but always ‘someone’ who shares in the dignity of the ‘image of God’. (*CCC* 362-368).
- Nowadays it’s common in wildlife documentaries to refer to human beings as just being another type of animal. Now, there are certainly things we have in common with animals – our need to eat, sleep, excrete, and reproduce. However, there are such striking dissimilarities, that we must consider human beings a completely different order of being on this planet; – for example, only human beings make promises; only human beings have a sense of self and give themselves in love to another; only human beings give their lives for strangers.
- In an earlier session, we mentioned that human beings are made in the image of God, which conveys the fact that we are very different from animals; we are a union of body and soul, we are persons.
- Nowadays the only time we hear about ‘soul’ is ‘soul’ music; this captures one of the realities of the ‘soul’, which concerns profound personal feelings, most especially love, including sexual love.
- The ‘soul’ signifies the spiritual dimension of our existence, the unique, inner-life of each one of us. 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.
- Our language of love is full of the images of the heart, which we see especially on Valentine’s Day. Can you think of any uses of the word ‘heart’ in relation to the theme ‘love’? (‘Heart-broken’, ‘heart-ache’, ‘talking heart-to-heart’, ‘heavy-heart’, heart-felt etc.)

- 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’ is the love you have for each other.
- God also gave us a spiritual nature so we could be capable of knowing and loving him.
- One of the reasons why God made us a union of body and soul is so we could form loving relationships with each other, create children to love, and love him.

2. The order and beauty of the world and the universe shows us everything has been created by God.

- **We can see signs of God’s design and purpose in nature.** This question is about seeing signs of God’s design and purpose in nature and our personal lives.
- The answer is ‘Strongly agree’. The Church teaches that we can come to know God in two ways: through our reason observing nature and ourselves, and through God’s Word in the Bible and the life of the Church. (CCC 31-38).
- Have you ever gone for a walk in the countryside, maybe somewhere remote and wild, and been struck by an overwhelming feeling of awe and wonder at its beauty and goodness? Or have you ever looked up at the stars in the night sky or at photographs of stars and galaxies in space and thought, ‘This is so beautiful and complex it must have been made somehow by God’?
- The signs of purpose and order in the universe are positive indications that God is the origin and end of everything.
- You might be surprised to hear that the Catholic Church doesn’t teach that the world was created in six days; and that the Church accepts some versions of evolution as a scientific explanation of our world. The Church doesn’t accept extreme theories of evolution that believe that human beings are the random products of chance and accidents. We hold that there is a purpose and direction to evolution, which is the emergence of self-conscious beings capable of reason and love.
- The Church also sees evidence for the existence of God as our creator in our experience of being human persons: “The human person: with our openness to truth and beauty, our sense of moral goodness, our freedom and the voice of our conscience, with our longings for the infinite and for happiness, we question ourselves about God’s existence. In all this we discern signs of our spiritual soul. The soul, the “seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material” can have its origin only in God. (CCC 33).

3. Sex is primarily for pleasure.

- **God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.** This question looks at the fact that God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life.
- The answer is ‘Strongly disagree’. 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).
- Yes, sex is pleasurable and that’s good, and is supposed to be fun. But is sex just about achieving our own pleasure? Is sex just about pleasuring each other?
- Have you come across the term, body language? This 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 married sexual love 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 thing that the body language between wife and husband says is, “I love every aspect of you so much that I want to make a baby 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 pro-creation of children. This is 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 personal union, that is indissoluble, faithful and open to life.

4. People can do selfless things for love of others.

- **Jesus reveals and heals our capacity for self-giving love.** This question looks at the truth that Jesus reveals and heals our capacity for self-giving love.
- The answer to this is ‘Strongly agree’. The Church teaches that we can only know our true dignity and the depth of our ability to love through Jesus Christ. (*CCC* 359, 1701).
- When we hear about husbands or wives committing adultery, or about the latest incident of alcohol-fuelled domestic abuse, or a wife finding out her husband is addicted to internet pornography, people tend to make the excuse, ‘It’s only human’.
- The truth of the matter is that such behaviour is ‘less than human’, and in fact every time we commit a sin we are being ‘less than human’.
- For the past 2000 years Christians have known that only one person truly shows us what it means to be fully human and that person is Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is important to all our lives, and to our marriages, because ‘he fully reveals man to man himself’. Only in the mystery of God becoming a human being in Jesus Christ do we learn what it means to be human, what we are really capable of doing in the name of love.
- Jesus shows us the truth of the Law of the Gift and its importance in our lives, we only find ourselves by giving ourselves away in acts of love. The Cross, or Crucifix, is so important to Christians because it is the sign, or logo, of this love.
- This saying of Jesus tells us the truth about love: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”. (John 15:13).
 - Now most likely we won’t ever be in situation where we have to give our lives to save others, but every day we are called to make sacrifices for the good of others.
 - Because of our inclination, or tendency, to be selfish and commit sins we need Jesus’ help to love like him; this is why he gave us the sacraments, including the sacrament of marriage, and why it’s important to pray to him.

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 In Vitro Fertilization 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.17) 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 go through the reasons the couples 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 sex to be not only very good, and to be enjoyed but also one of the most powerful and intimate ways of giving and receiving love between a husband and wife.

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. A detailed exposition of this falls 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 further pregnancies once a couple decides they have the number of children they want.

- 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 contraception and Natural Fertility Awareness is that contraception is unnatural and 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 is with IVF, all kinds of gravely immoral acts become possible. For example, experimentation on embryonic human beings, gender 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. The *Catechism* 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 promising note of having children.

Key points: Make the following points:

- When you make your marriage vows, you will make the following promise: I am 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.18) 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 easy! You will probably need more time to reflect on what we have covered.
- For 'homework' read the summary material (*Couple's Book*, p.17-19) and think about 'What will we do as a result of this session?'
- Remember to keep praying the prayer on the summary sheet from the first session.

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