

Listening to God Together

The Way of Prayer

This session focuses on two questions. What is the value of married couples praying together? And, how will you plan to make prayer part of your marriage and family?

The Value of Praying Together

The phrase, “poor in spirit,” does not have an obvious meaning. For most, the word poor makes one think that this is a negative statement. Being poor in spirit signifies detachment from worldly things and voluntary humility. This Beatitude serves as a command to put our trust in God, not in wealth or power. Those who follow Jesus and want to see God seek to have this attitude that is opposed to seeking meaning in life through the pursuit of money and possessions. Prayer and fasting are the antidote for this tendency in our hearts towards greed, power, and even inordinate comfort that are some of the effects of original sin. “Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God” (Catechism 2548).

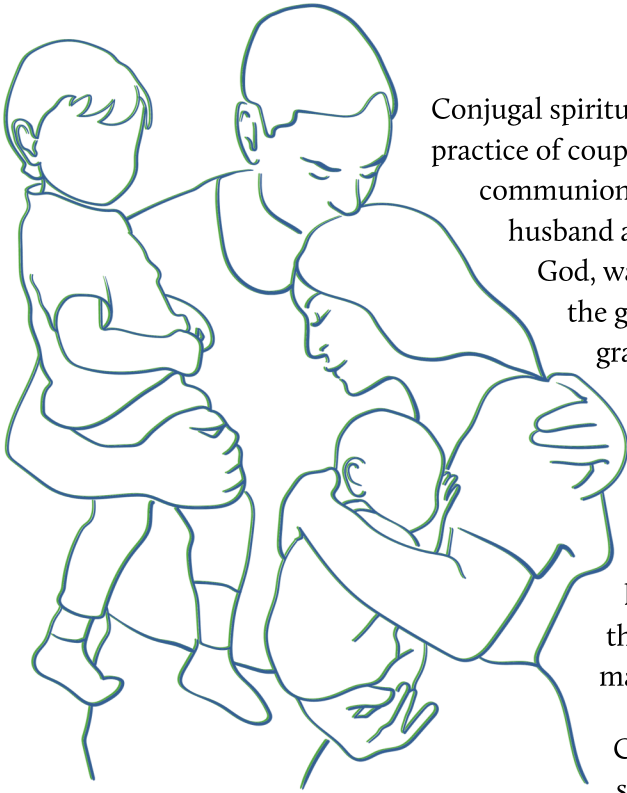


The value of prayer in your marriage then, is found in developing the discipline of making time for prayer which in turn deepens your trust in God and provides the grace to know His will for your marriage and family and choose it wholeheartedly.

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Rooted in love, commitment and shared Faith, Catholic marriage creates a union that can elevate the mundane and bring about the kingdom of God. Conjugal spirituality — the shared spiritual life of spouses — illuminates the path towards a deeper communion with God within the context of the Sacrament of Marriage.



Conjugal spirituality (or married spirituality) is founded upon the practice of couple prayer and provides couples with a way to develop communion with God, together. “Couple prayer is the prayer of a husband and wife who, standing side by side in the presence of God, want to praise him together, worship him and ask him for the grace of living their sacrament more deeply and for the grace of living according to his will” (Domestic Church movement formation materials). In practical terms, this involves the spouses addressing their prayer to God directly and out loud in one another’s presence. “Through their prayer, a couple tells the Lord about their desire to be with him, and admits that without his love, they are not able to love each other as he wants them to” (Domestic Church movement formation materials).

Conjugal spirituality extends beyond the confines of the spouses, encompassing the whole family. In family prayer,

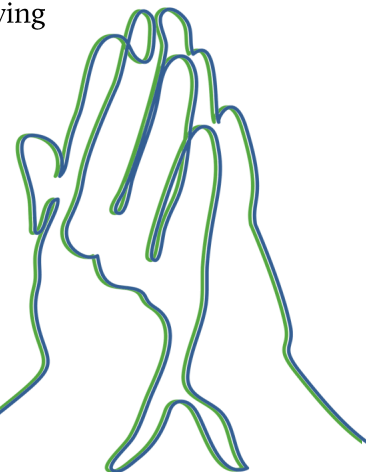
the household comes together daily to listen to the word of God and entrust their needs to God as children of the Father. Family prayer has many expressions, and the format must be adapted to the

ages, needs and personalities of the children. The fruits of family prayer are faith, compassion, forgiveness and service within the home. “In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit... prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. It’s dimensions are those of Christ’s love” (Catechism 2565).

Research has found that prayer also leads to an increase in mental health outcomes. In recent years scientists have done research correlating prayer habits and mental health. “The neuroscientist Andrew Newberg found that praying

the Rosary lowers levels of stress and anxiety” (The Gospel of Happiness, 73). Research has also shown reduced aggression towards one’s enemies in those who prayed for them. This counterintuitive and countercultural command from Jesus to his disciples. “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44), actually changes the outlook of the disciple who practices it.

“Positive psychology also sheds light on one of the central prayers of Christianity,” the Our Father. This prayer grounds us in the proper perspective and shows us the authentic attitude of the children of God.





In praying ‘hallowed be Thy name,’ we are appreciating who God is: holy, exalted, perfect. We are loving God in an act of appreciating who He is. In praying ‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,’ we are uniting our will with God’s will. Since God’s will is for the good of all human beings, including ourselves, in praying ‘Thy will be done’ we are also having goodwill for all people including ourselves. Loving and serving others is a sure path to increased happiness” (The Gospel of Happiness, 76).

⇒ *Discuss Together*

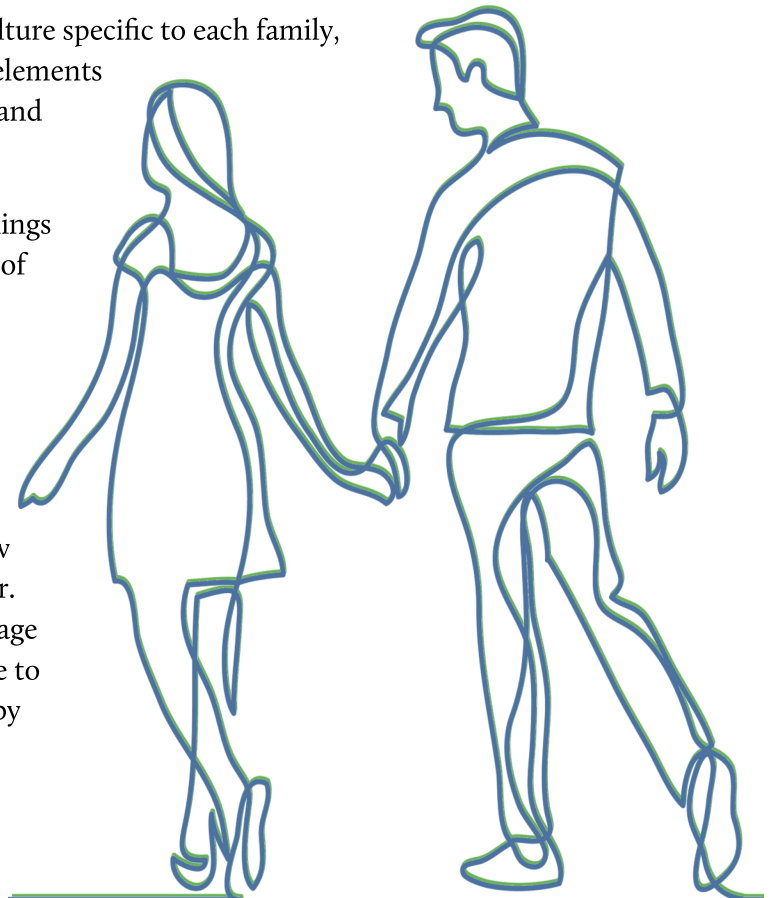
Can a husband and wife direct the culture of their home in specific ways? If so, how and to what end?

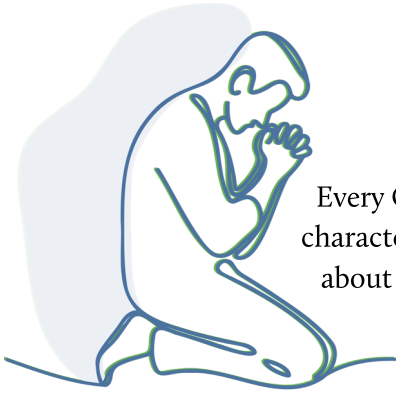
Making a Plan

Culture is a way of life involving customs and lifestyle with common elements of culture shared among members of the same nation, ethnicity, religion, etc. Every family has a unique culture that impacts its members for better or worse.

There is also a culture specific to each family, having some common elements shared with other families and others specific to each.

The root of the word culture is related to two things that pertain directly to the identity and mission of Marriage. The Latin *cultus* refers to both the worship of God and the nurturing of life (agriculture). The identity of the Christian family begins with the sacrament of Baptism, which is the foundation upon which the man and woman entrust their lives to one another in the sacrament of Marriage. Their new identity is rooted in the worship of God together. Dedication to God directs the vocation of Marriage toward its mission. This mission is loving service to each other and any children they may be gifted by God’s providence (natural or adopted).





Every Catholic family has elements of worship and service that share common characteristics. Each one also has the opportunity to make intentional decisions about how they will live as faithful disciples through worship (participation at Mass, prayer in the home, etc.) and service (household chores, acts of charity in the home and to those in need in the community, etc.).

This intentional decision-making is most fruitful when the spouses (along with older children if they have them) discuss it together, prayerfully consider their initial decisions, and then write it down. Here, the Catholic practice called a rule of life (or plan of life) – usually referring to individual believers’ plans - may also be applied to the family. This rule of life is a matter of the heart. As the Lord says, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” What we value in our life directs our heart either toward God or away. This is another way to describe family culture. How we nurture life, the lives immediately around us, reveals the direction in which we are headed. The overall goal of the rule of life is to respond to God’s calling for us and seek to grow in holiness.

To begin this intentional approach, one could start with a question like this: “What would Jesus do, and how would He prove His love for the Father and His brothers and sisters?”

The answer to this and many other questions must be concrete. It should cover all aspects of our life, the use of our time, abilities, and even our money. It should be reviewed regularly (even as often as monthly) and changed accordingly. The rule of life, when implemented, can help married couples survive difficulties and challenges together because they are more prepared to weather storms and trust one another and God.

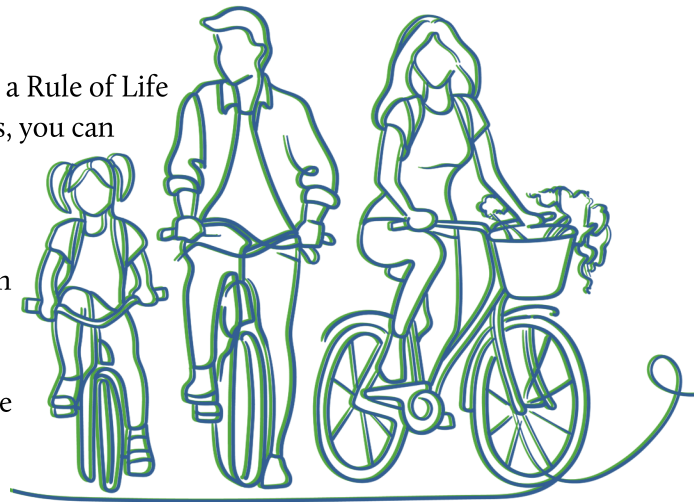


When establishing a rule of life, it is good to avoid making it too difficult. This could become a source of sinful pride when we find success, and should we fail, we may easily get discouraged! Conversely, if it is too easy, it will not assist with spiritual progress and may display spiritual laziness.

Family Rule of Life

This is a worksheet for you to use going forward as you create a Rule of Life that serves you well as a couple and then, as your family grows, you can revisit this to regularly adapt your Family Rule of Life to meet your changing needs and circumstances.

Here is a list of practical topics for dialogue leading to creation of and review of your own Family Rule of Life. Remember these are your decisions to make together and always with mutual respect. The more intentional you are in your marriage with these things, the more likely you will see growth and the more resilient you are likely to be when things are difficult.



Family Mission

- ◆ Identity in Christ
- ◆ Roles of Husband/Father
- ◆ Roles of Wife/Mother
- ◆ Openness to Life (how we will discern, etc.)
- ◆ Roles of Children
- ◆ Family Meetings (when/format, etc.)
- ◆ Date nights
- ◆ Monthly Dialogue or other format to review of Rule of Life
- ◆ Education of Children (school choices, faith formation, etc.)
- ◆ Discipline/correction of children (what is our approach? growth in virtue and vices to avoid)
- ◆ Consequences for breaking rules/reward systems
- ◆ Growth in love between family members
- ◆ Extended family
- ◆ Approach to using baby sitters

Household Management

- ◆ Food and meals
- ◆ Cleaning and chores
- ◆ Vehicle and home maintenance
- ◆ Budget (monthly review? more often?)
- ◆ Shopping
- ◆ Medical needs
- ◆ Insurance needs
- ◆ Family dress/modesty
- ◆ Mental and emotional health needs
- ◆ Fitness/nutrition/rest
- ◆ Family communication
- ◆ Technology use/media consumption

Spiritual Life

- ◆ Personal prayer
- ◆ Family prayer
- ◆ Sunday Mass and restful celebration of Sundays
- ◆ Personal/Family Faith Formation
- ◆ Traditions/Feasts/Celebrating Holidays
- ◆ Charitable giving
- ◆ Annual Retreat and or pilgrimage
- ◆ Regular Confession
- ◆ Family devotions and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- ◆ Schedule
- ◆ Establish norms for waking/bedtime
- ◆ Daily prayer times
- ◆ Family meals/mealtimes
- ◆ Housework/yardwork

Service in parish and community

- ◆ Hospitality/guests
- ◆ Involvement in groups (parish, school, etc.)
- ◆ Volunteer service
- ◆ Civic duties
- ◆ Service to other families/those in need

Recreation

- ◆ Sunday rest
- ◆ Entertainment/media consumption
- ◆ Family Vacation
- ◆ Family Retreat/Summer Camps/etc.
- ◆ Sports
- ◆ Hobbies (individual/family)
- ◆ Family fun (board games, group activities, etc.)



Couple Discussion Questions

Here are a few questions for spouses to get started discussing the creation of a rule of life. You may recall that you were invited to have a similar discussion in the Thrive workbook on page 246 and you may want to revisit any notes you made there.

These questions may be rephrased to better apply to newly married or long-married spouses (and some even for discussions with older children). In your meeting with your parish mentor couple they are invited to share some of their answers to these questions as well so that you can learn from their experience how they have handled things from their family of origin/upbringing, how they practice Sundays well, how they nurture friendships that build up their marriage relationship and family, etc.

- ◆ **What do you know about what is most essential to loving relationships? How do you plan to communicate love in your Marriage?**
- ◆ **In what ways do you want your home be like/unlike your family of origin? What things from your upbringing do you want to avoid in your home and which would be good to foster?**
- ◆ **In what ways is God calling you to pray as individuals, as spouses, and as a family?**
- ◆ **How do we practice Sundays as a day of rest, prayer, and recreation? Are we satisfied with our answer? If not, what could we do differently?**
- ◆ **How can you nurture friendships that will build up your new family?**
- ◆ **Are there things in your life hindering your family unity, peace, or practice of the Faith?**
- ◆ **What can you do to keep trust and romance alive in your Marriage?**

Some ideas and phrases here are loosely translated from an article by D. Franków, "The Rule of Life" – an article in "The Domestic Church. A Letter to Families" Nr 78

