

**PROGRAM FOR THE SECOND YEAR OF  
BASIC FORMATION**



**The Year of the  
Covenant of Love**

**Family Branch  
Schoenstatt Apostolic Movement**

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## **PROGRAM FOR THE SECOND YEAR OF BASIC FORMATION THE YEAR OF THE COVENANT OF LOVE**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

**It is essential that group leaders understand the process and objectives of this year of the Basic Formation Cycle. We call it “The Year Of The Covenant Of Love”.**

### **I. GENERAL SENSE OF THE SECOND YEAR OF THE BASIC FORMATION CYCLE**

WE SEEK TO LEARN TO LIVE THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY AS A COVENANT OF MUTUAL LOVE, IN CLOSE LOVING UNITY WITH MARY IN HER SHRINE.

There is a double sense to the second year of the Basic Formation Cycle:

In the first place, this year is about helping to discover one’s own marriage as a Covenant of Love.

The second objective is to journey, in the light of the marital Covenant of Love, **toward the Covenant of Love with God, through Mary.**

During this year, the goal is for married couples to discover and internalize the very core of their marriage: that mutual love that unites them for their entire lives, by which they have given each other a resounding “yes,” which leads them to become “one body” and to form a “lifelong consortium” (Familiaris Consortio). The essence of their marriage, of their marital happiness, is this covenant of mutual love. It is a covenant that requires constant renewal, that must grow, solidify, and be fruitful in every stage of life, and must apostolically go forth through their marital holiness.

**This marital Covenant of Love was elevated to the sacramental level by the Lord. It is an efficacious sign of the Covenant of Love that God has made with humanity, the beginnings of which are found in the Old Testament, and which was sealed for eternity in its perfect form in Jesus Christ.**

The spousal Covenant of Love is raised up by the Sacrament of Matrimony to be an efficacious sign of the New Covenant, that of the loving union of Christ with His Church. In this way, all spouses who have received the Sacrament of Matrimony are called, and qualified by the grace inherent in the sacrament, to be the image, pathway, and protectors of the union of Christ and the Church.

Spouses also receive from that divine reality their most solid foundation, and their deepest well of vitality and permanence.

This “Year of the Covenant of Love”, through group meetings and conferences, seeks to immerse married couples into the world of the natural and divine Covenant of Love.

There is a reason that this year is not solely dedicated to discover the marital Covenant of Love, leaving for later the Covenant of Love with Mary. This is because this covenant

with the Blessed Mother is the fundamental force that drives the spirituality and teachings of Schoenstatt. Ignoring, even for a moment, the covenant with Mary is to postpone the grace and task that God has given us. As previously stated, the covenant with Mary is not only our goal, but also our path. There are no special obstacles to introducing the Covenant of Love with Mary at the beginning of the Basic Formation Cycle, as we recall that the Marian element of our faith is one of the most precious treasures of the Catholic Church.

During the present year we specifically mean for every group member and every marriage, through their spousal covenant, to **deeply immerse themselves in the image of Mary**, and to establish a **Covenant of Love with her**.

As we move closer to the Covenant of Love with Mary, we should be gradually visiting the history of Schoenstatt graces, into the Covenant of Love undertaken by Fr. Kentenich with our Mother and Queen of Schoenstatt in the Shrine. In other words, we want every married couple to internalize and enter into the **“Mystery of Schoenstatt,”** that they experience the Sanctuary as “home,” as a place of grace. We want them to have life experiences there, as groups, as couples, and as families.

This second year of our Basic Cycle of Formation climaxes with the Covenant of Love, sealed with our Mother and Queen of Schoenstatt in her Shrine. If certain people have reservations or feel inhibited by the invitation to seal a Covenant of Love with Mary, we have an opportunity to explain its sense and to make it more understandable (it is not necessary to be “perfect” to seal the covenant; on the contrary, it is because of our imperfection that we need to unite ourselves to her through the Covenant). If, in spite of this, people do not wish to undertake the Covenant at this time, it is not a problem: if people have a vocation for Schoenstatt, the time will eventually come for their Covenant. On the other hand, we will doubtlessly encounter other communities in the Church where the Marian movement is not as central as it is in Schoenstatt.

At the end of the year, by using group feedback, the group moderators will select a married couple to serve as group leaders.

## II. FORMATION PROGRAM

**The formative dimension of this year’s program encompasses:**

- **A conference at the year’s beginning (See Appendix 1, p. 88)**
- **Night with Mary, a Marian encounter;**
- **A conference close to the Covenant date. (See Appendix 2, p. 93)**
- **Group meetings**

### 1. Conference at Year’s Beginning

This conference addresses the larger picture of God’s Covenant with mankind as the central theme of the history of salvation, and how that covenant, in which Christian fulfillment is found, is reborn and remade in every Christian marriage. During the

conference, we are aware that, generally speaking, a couple's knowledge of the Sacrament of Matrimony is quite deficient. It is therefore necessary to help couples to discover that the sacrament that they have received is the foundation of the matrimonial and family sanctity to which they are called.

At this same conference, we explain how the Covenant of Love with Mary (who personifies the Church), as Schoenstatt lives it, is the shortest and most sure path to living the Covenant of Love with Christ and the Holy Trinity.

The Covenant of Love with Mary is the great gift of Schoenstatt, which feeds and grows the Marital Covenant.

With this foundation established, we reveal the path to what the rest of the Year of Covenant will be in the **group meetings**.

The purpose of the group meetings is for the married couples, having rediscovered their intimate nature in the Covenant of Love, to commit to deepen it and to grow in it.

As an example for the development of the conferences and the course of preparation for the covenant, we have added an appendix containing a possible outline for the same. (See Appendix 1, p. 87)

2. Our Night with Mary is an invitation to communally experience an encounter with Our Lady.

3. Conference before the group covenants. Retreat to help couples prepare the Prayer of Covenant, and to savor the step they are about to take.

#### 4. Group Meetings.

##### 4.1. Previous Observations

This entire year focuses on the Spousal Covenant of Love and the Covenant of Love with Mary in her Shrine.

Group meetings are a central part of our formation. While not being the only expression of group life, they remain extremely important. We should clearly highlight the **“workshop” aspect of the meetings**.

This means that we highlight **the active participation of all group members**. The life of the group should not become a rigid protocol concerned mainly with the coverage and discussion of a pre-determined topic; rather, it should become a group in which ideals are discovered and applied to life in an organic fashion, and in which its members, particularly married couples, are brought to an authentic transformation and growth.

Married couples are required, in relation to topics, to **internalize the topic in their hearts and apply it honestly to their lives**, and to really **“work” the proposed topic** during and between meetings by sharing real life experiences of people, couples, families, and life environments, and to arrive at a concrete experience of life conversion

and commitment. This is normally achieved through the group commitment adopted at the end of each meeting.

We are aware that this pedagogical approach demands much of the moderators and of the group: it is easier to exchange ideas and opinions than it is to grow in our transformation and life commitment. However, this is indispensable to carry out our mission: to become the “soul of the world” as seeds of a new culture.

#### 4.2. Program of Group Meetings

The **Director’s Manual** contains a detailed explanation of the preparation and facilitation of the group meeting. Therefore, we will not refer in detail to the Manual here (yet we suggest reviewing it). However, we should remind ourselves of a few things:

- Do not forget to have a long, peaceful **Opening Prayer**. (App. D, p 81)
- Do not conclude a meeting without formulating a **Group Commitment** (including a commitment review following the Opening Prayer of the next meeting).
- Explain the agenda of the **following meeting**, including who will deliver the introduction, and who will facilitate the group discussion (it could be the same person).

It is important to have, for basic reading and as a complement for meeting topics, the books *Schoenstatt Covenant of Love with Mary*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, and *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt. It is especially needed at those times when supplemental group activities are not possible during meetings, and to guide reading according to what the group is working on. It is recommended that each person read through this book. During many meetings we will also assign specific chapters or excerpts, so it is necessary that each couple have a copy.

**The meeting plan** is conceived from the perspective of the Covenant of Love.

The first meetings address the meaning of a Covenant of Love and the ways in which this covenant can grow and strengthen.

It is presumed that, during the conference at the year’s beginning, the couples have been encouraged to see their marriage as a Covenant of Love, and that this covenant is in harmony with the Covenant of Love revealed in Sacred Scripture.

These Covenants of Love, both natural and supernatural, grow (or weaken and die) to the degree by which the covenant participants:

- first, **increase the knowledge they have of each other;**
- second, **enrich their communication;** and
- third, **provide each other with proofs that demonstrate and deepen their mutual love.**

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## Meeting 1: An Invitation to Live a Year of Covenant

**Objective:** Present an overview of the Year of the Covenant of Love (detailed in the Introduction to the Second Year), and plan the year according to the moderator's outline.

### 1. Opening Prayer

### 2. Content

It is assumed that the couples have already acquired a general knowledge of Schoenstatt:

- That they have formed groups, that they have discussed some general topics about matrimony, deepening their understanding of the previous general encounters.
- That a more personal attachment has been established between the group and the moderators, and that they are all concerned about the conduct of the group and of every marriage that comprises it.

In this context, they explain **the sense of this year as “The Year of Covenant,”** both as a married couple and with Mary, and thus transform themselves into instruments in her hands, as apostles and builders of God's Kingdom on Earth.

After this, they present a general outline about the **Program of Meetings:**

The first meeting shall be devoted to discovering the types of covenants that exist, and what makes a covenant. That the covenant is the deepest mystery or reality of a matrimony is deeply explored.

How to grow and internalize this covenant, how to grow in **mutual love**, is the question that will guide and challenge us this year.

### **Growing in love is the great task of our lives.**

We recall that Jesus' new commandment puts love in the center: “This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) This commandment includes a concrete task: **radiate love**, that others may grow in the fullness of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Fr. Kenterich gives us a simple and practical formula. He states that to grow in love:

- I must **know** the **you**;
- I must **communicate** with the **you**; and
- I must show you **concrete proofs** of my love.



This will be the general framework of our meetings:

Truthfully, all love grows to the degree in which we know the **you**, to which we communicate with the **you**, and to which we show, with loving deeds, that we believe in this love.

**Knowledge precedes, accompanies, and feeds love.**

**This love grows through communication** between the me and the **you**.

Communication enables a closeness and sharing of interests and affections that are an essential component of love. Communication is more than a simple conversation or exchange of ideas. It is the giving of self to the **you**, a mutual giving of all that we are, of our hopes and dreams. It consists of a give and take. Communication requires humility and respect in order to become deep and stable. It enriches us and creates attachments that transcend words and time.

Another aspect crowns and, at the same time, brings an authentic loving dimension to the established relationship: **the capacity to show and prove love through sacrifice**. Saint John says: "Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine." (1 John 3:18). He thus echoes the words of Our Lord: "It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Mt 7:21).

We know, from experience, that we believe most in the love and friendship of those who have proven it with deeds. **We can be sure of our love for a person when we are willing to forgo things that we value for them**. Another experience is added to this: the **Covenant of Love** becomes deeper and is **purified in shared pain and trials**. Pain is like a seal of authentic love. So it was for the Lord: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). He gives His life and calls us to share His cross: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mk 8:34) Thus is true love tested and strengthened.

These three aspects – mutual knowledge, communication, and proofs of love, which are natural determiners for the growth and consolidation of natural love – are also determiners in the supernatural plane, as in our Covenant of Love with Mary and relationship with the Trinity.

Therefore, we should, in one or more meetings, examine how and how much we know each other, what are the things that allow us to know each other better, etc, so that, in a later meeting, we can ask how we can know Mary better, and how we can deepen our knowledge of her. Later on, after deepening communication between spouses, we will examine our communication (prayer) with Mary. We can then examine the proofs of love that we offer to the person we love, and also the proofs that we offer to Mary in our Covenant with her.

And so, in our journey towards a Covenant of Love with Mary, the cultivation of these three aspects will allow us, in a simple yet practical way, to immerse ourselves into a life of Covenant. "By walking we learn to walk. By loving, to love." The best way to love those of the supernatural world with all our hearts is to grow in love in the natural world:

love of our neighbor (in this case, love of our spouse) is the expression, journey, and proof of our love for God and Mary.

After finishing this introduction (and having answered any questions), **speak of the year's Program**. It is important that the entire program be clear, including: retreat, conferences and the course of study, and the meetings.

### **3. Commitment.**

It is important to end each meeting, starting with the first one, to end with a group commitment that addresses the topic and its concrete reality in the lives of group members.

### **4. Post meeting homework:**

Each couple should begin reading *Schoenstatt Covenant of Love*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, and *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt.

## Meeting 2: What is a Covenant?

**Objective:** Deepen our understanding of a Covenant of Love, as in the types of covenant that our experience reveals to us, to help us deepen our mutual love.

1. Opening Prayer
2. Review Assigned Reading
3. Content (summarize)

The meaning of the term “Covenant”

(Remember that this introduction should last about 10 minutes. What follows is basic material for the moderator to use for general context. It is vital that this material become engrained in the group’s life and environment. It is not intended for rote repetition, and even less to be read. Rather, it is meant to be background for group discussions.)

Entering a covenant means to join forces, to unite, in order to undertake a task or obtain some benefit. A covenant is a promise established between two or more people who unite their forces and interests with a common goal in mind. The allies establish a kind of confederation. The word covenant comes from the latin “foedus,” hence our words confederation or federal.

I take thee for me	I give myself to thee.
You are required to do....	How may I serve you?
What do I get from you?	What can I give to you?
I’ll meet you halfway.	I give you all of me.
I have to.....	I want to.....
Exit clauses	Designed by God to Be lifelong

A Covenant is not a “Contract,” which is defined as an agreement between two or more parties, especially one that is written and enforceable by law. Contracts are based on the desire for protection and mistrust. They allow the parties involved to look for loopholes and exist clauses, and are centered on your rights and protection. The Bible doesn’t say anything about “contracts” anywhere in scripture, but uses the Hebrew word for covenant over 300 times!

## Contractual vs Covenant Marriage

Our more specific definition refers to our second term: the Covenant of Love. This does not refer to a mere treaty or association, in which forces join to accomplish a specific goal, benefit, or profit. When we speak of a Covenant of Love, we are referring to something much deeper, personal, and life-affirming. We are speaking of a commitment that essentially is a commitment of the heart. Other types of agreements or alliances seek an extrinsic benefit, but this is not about something impersonal or outside of ourselves. The Covenant of Love involves our entire being; it is a commitment that stems from freely giving to another. Every mutually loving relationship is a covenant. Whenever a friendship is sealed, it is a covenant that is sealed. If a matrimonial commitment is made, what is being sealed is a Covenant of Love. The Schoenstatt Covenant of Love is most fundamentally an **exchange of hearts** with the Blessed Mother, a beautiful and powerful truth that will be explained more in depth in a later meeting.

## Different types of Covenants of Love

To better understand the meaning, we should start from our natural experiences. We should therefore ask ourselves how we have experienced Covenants of Love.

We will focus on two central covenant experiences: the relationships of friendship and of matrimony.

### Friendship

Each of us has experienced friendship. It has been said that the greatest treasure is a true friend, and this is so very true! There is nothing better than finding someone who we can call friend, on whom we can always count, who is always willing to help us and who can also count on us in every circumstance. It is simply wonderful to have someone who will always be loyal and faithful to us.

Laín Entralgo, a great Spanish philosopher, defines friendship in a beautiful way. He says: “friendship is a kind of benevolence, of beneficence, and of confidence. It consists of allowing the other to be as he is and of helping him to be what he should be.”

Friendship is a kind of mystery that is first and foremost comprised of benevolence, that type of empathy felt for someone else: wanting the best for the other, harmony with the heart of the **you**.

In addition, friendship does not belong in the heart's interior. It is expressed by beneficence, shows itself in service, and by acceding to and pleasing the desires of the other.

Friendship implies a manner of "complicity" between people. There is an interior communication and a disposition to share sorrow and joy with the friend. It is so comforting to be able to count on someone to whom we do not have to explain ourselves or be cautious with; with whom we can be transparent, because we know that they love us just as we are, and understand us beyond words!

Laín Entralgo continues his definition by stating, "Friendship consists in allowing the other to be who he is, and to help him carefully and respectfully to become who he should be." In other words, friendship means allowing the other to exist just as he is, to love him for who he is. In true friendship, there is no desire or intention to manipulate the other, to change the other. However, there is clear sightedness. This means that we do see the other realistically, and that we are aware that, in their reality, things exist that are bad and that need to change, to correct, or to develop. Friendship has the quality of helping the other grow, develop and change, but it is done respectfully, with care, without hurting.

How does friendship grow? It grows through contact, through communication. If two friends were to never speak, they would drift apart, and their relationship would cool. Friends must maintain contact, in one way or another, to cultivate communication. Their communication takes many forms: with many words and sometimes with few words, or simply with gestures. A certain language that always maintains communication between friends exists.

However, there is something else that makes a friendship grow: the sacrifice, or the proof or test. When one has not shown, one way or another, that he is capable of denying himself, his tastes, his own profit, for a friend, we cannot know yet whether friendship truly exists.

Friendship grows in trials or tests. This is when we know if someone is truly a friend. Friendship is offered for better or worse, but is tested especially in bad times. This is when one learns who his true friends are, and normally, they are few.

True friendship does not monopolize a person. Perhaps this happens sometimes during the early stages of friendships, which is natural. But when two people cultivate a friendship in which friends of the friend are rejected, this is not friendship; rather, it is self-centered. The desire to monopolize the other, to have them always with you and for you is simple selfishness. It is not benevolence, beneficence, or confidence. This is not self-giving. Friendship should be focused on the other, and involves giving of one's interior richness to the other. True friendship is happy with who the other is, accepts the other for him or herself and for his or her relationships.

It should be noted that, as we attend these meetings and reflect on our experiences, that the Covenant of Love becomes more alive. We are so fortunate that our homes

and our lives are held in Mary's heart; we find that we are living in her and she is living in us. We are blessed to have her as a confidante, who will always listen, never reject us no matter what we've done or how we've failed. She will always be, in one way or another, on our side. We are blessed in that she is someone who understands us, yet also expects much of us. She does not merely spoil us with love, but also requires much of us, because she loves us.

Our Covenant of Love grows to the degree to which we remain in personal contact with Mary, to which we learn to communicate with her, to which we develop a mutual language with her. In our Covenant of Love with Mary, each of us will cultivate a personal language for understanding and communicating with her.

It is when we are put to the test, in the moment of surrender, of carrying our cross, that our love will grow and be sanctified.

Friendship knows no ages, genders, nationalities or conditions. It overcomes all prejudice and breaks down all barriers, even the most overwhelming ones. It is under these harsh conditions that it flowers most surprisingly.

Because of friendship, one person is united with another without asking or demanding anything. Friends know that their friendship will be reciprocated. We have confidence in the other simply because he is our friend. We respect and love him.

Friendship is like a snare that makes us feel attached to the other from within. "Tame me," said the fox to the Little Prince. "What does taming mean?" asked the Little Prince. "Taming is ensnaring. If you tame me, I no longer will be just one fox among the thousands of foxes in existence."

Friendship is personal. It is an attachment characterized by affection, and also by gratitude and freedom. "I accept you as a friend, just as you are, because that's how I want it." A friend does not impose conditions, a friend respects originality, a friend hopes for the best for the other and is faithful. I will not betray, nor will I allow others to betray. I care about who my friend is and about his future.

Seneca asks, "Why do you acquire a friend?" He answers himself, "In order to have someone to die for, to have someone to follow into exile, to save someone from death as they oppose mine."

Friendship requires that we go outside of ourselves and direct ourselves to the other. It opens us to other realities, to sharing our treasures with our friend, and to receive theirs. Because of my love for a friend, I begin to love what had not previously attracted me: my friend's world and interests. Friendship produces a true exchange of hearts and deep communication. Remember Plato's definition of friendship: "This is true friendship, loving and rejecting the same things." (*id est vera amicitia: idem velle idem nolle*).

Aristotle stated "Love properly consists of loving rather than being loved, and since, to our eyes, those who love their friends are worthy of praise, it seems that love must be the great virtue of friends." Jesus Christ said, "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15: 13).

There is no doubt that friendship is a Covenant of Love. It is a free commitment of love. Although it can exist between people of different ages, it normally develops among peers. Friendship is a commitment of love that is tested in all circumstances of life, but especially during hard times. It is essentially faithful, and immune to time and distance. It needs to be expressed, lest it slowly dim and extinguish.

### **The Spousal Relationship**

The spousal relationship between married people is also a Covenant of Love. Marital love is characterized by a total belonging of body and soul. Those who love in this way give themselves to each other with total freedom, to the point that they are no longer two, but one being, as an ineffable mutual identification. They have one heart, one soul, one same yearning, one same pain, one same joy, and one same fruit of love that perpetuates their unity in their children.

Spousal or marital love consists of a mutual giving or surrender. It is total, indivisible, free, and for as long as they both shall live. Its aim is mutual enrichment. The fullness of this loving relationship is expressed in the way the couple becomes one, fusing their bodies and souls. This mutual loves leads to the couple becoming fruitful by producing children.

Spousal love is a unique communion of love, life, futures, sufferings, and of joys. It is a community that is forged and maintained in faithfulness, and it is the fruit of a free choice of love, exclusively and forever.

We should not be surprised that our Sacred Scripture constantly uses the analogy of spousal love to describe the Covenant of Love between God and his people. For example, from the prophet Hosea:

“But look, I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart.

There I shall give her back her vineyards, and make the Vale of Achor a gateway of hope. There she will respond as when she was young, as on the day when she came up from Egypt.

When that day comes- declares Yahweh- you will call me, 'My husband', no more will you call me, 'My Baal'.

I shall banish the names of the Baals from her lips and their name will be mentioned no more.” (Hosea 2: 16-19)

“I shall betroth you to myself forever, I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness. Yes, I shall betroth you to myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh.” (Hosea 2: 21-220)

God seems to say, “Because I am joined to you as a husband to his wife, because I choose you and marry you in faithfulness and tenderness, you will come to know who I am, because only love is capable of a deep and personal knowing.”

Sacred Scripture contains many mentions of God’s union with Israel using the analogy of spousal love. Thus the breach of the covenant is equivalent to the prostitution of

Israel's virgin, the daughter of Zion, who turns her back on Yahweh in search of the Baals, or idols:

“Ephraim have I known, Israel is not hidden from me; and yet, Ephraim, you have played the whore, Israel is befouled. Their deeds do not allow them to return to their God, since an urge to play the whore possesses them and they no longer know Yahweh.” (Hosea 5: 3-4)

It is significant that Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians (Ch. 5), links the union of spouses to the union of Christ with the Church. How should a husband love his wife? He should love her as Christ loves His Church. How does Christ love His Church? As a husband loves his wife. The mystery of the Sacrament of Matrimony consists of being sign and image of the spousal union of Christ with His Church, His bride.

**Using this analogy, we can then say that the Covenant of Love consists of a loving promise between two people who given themselves to each other freely and forever, whose richness is precisely that mutual belonging and consecration of one to the other. In this union, spouses are fruitful, and together forge a family.**

The marital covenant helps us to understand our covenant with God and Mary in a more existential and vital way. Our covenant, sealed with the divine, reflects the reality that exists between spouses: that of free choice and intimate giving that is mutual and personal, and results in a singular communion of life, task, and future. So based on this analogy, we can say that our covenant with Mary is a Covenant of Love by which we give ourselves entirely to her, and she gives herself to us.

The marital covenant is a deeper commitment than that which is found between friends. It requires a commitment of the entire self to the other. In this covenant, nobody thinks of himself in isolation, but always in, with, and for the other. There is an exclusive and private mutual belonging between both. It supersedes and excludes any love that is “parallel” to the spousal relationship. All other types of love are either subordinate or dependent on spousal love, since everything in life is faced together. As a married couple together form a new kingdom, as they face life's challenges together, so also do they unite their lives inextricably with Christ and the Blessed Mother.

When we analyze how the Covenant of Love grows and deepens, we find, as mentioned before, that there are three factors that bring this about: the knowledge we have of the other, the type of communication we have with the other, and the proofs that we offer of our love.

#### **4. Group Discussion:**

After the group leader (or another group member) offers the introduction based on the above topic, we move on to the **active part** of the meeting.

The idea is for members to “bring the topic down to where we live,” or address the topic in a very personal way.



It is suggested to divide into groups consisting of 2 couples (4 people). Each small group should share (after 5 minutes of personal reflection on paper) about their experience of mutual knowledge, communication, and proofs of love.

After the small group exercise, the larger group meets and each small group shares their most important points.

The **group commitment** should be made from the results of the sharing.

### 5. Post meeting homework:

Continue reading *Schoenstatt Covenant of Love*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt. *Covenant in Salvation History*, chapters 1-2, and chapter one of *Men, Women and the Mystery of Love*, by Edward Sri.

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## ATTACHMENT

### ARISTOTLE'S BASIC FORMS OF FRIENDSHIP

It may be helpful here to quickly review Aristotle's description of three different kinds of friendship. The first, a *friendship of utility*, is an affection based on the benefit or use that the friends derive from the relationship. Business relationships are often good examples, in that each person gets something out of the relationship to his good or advantage, and the mutual benefit is what unites the people as friends. Their feelings for each other can be quite cordial and warm. In the second category, a *pleasant friendship*, the affection is based on the pleasure one gets out of the relationship. The friendship is primarily about having fun together in areas of mutual interest, such as music, sports, exercise. The individuals may sincerely care for each other, but it is the good times they have together that unites them.

For Aristotle, these two are the more basic forms of friendship, not representative of friendship in the fullest sense and marked by an element of fragility. When the mutual benefits, shared activities, or fun times no longer exist, there is little left to unite the two people. If one person moves, changes jobs, or tires of the shared activity, the friendship may change or begin to dissolve. This helps us to understand why friendships among younger people can shift so often, with the transitions from high school to college to postgraduate programs and then to the world of employment. Interests, values, and addresses may change. Moral convictions meet the pressures of conformity and moral relativism. If friendships in these important years are not based on something more profound than living in the same dorm or playing the same sports, they are not likely to survive the long term.

Aristotle's third category, virtuous friendship, embodies friendship in its fullest sense—the two friends are united not in self-interest, but in the shared pursuit of a common goal outside of themselves: the good, moral life that is found through virtue. They are committed to striving side-by-side toward the higher good, concerned primarily with what is best for the friend and pursuing the virtuous life with that person.

With this background, we can better understand John Paul II's foundational **personalist principle** of relationships, that "...a person must not be **merely** the means to an end for another person," - that we should not treat the people in our lives as mere instruments for our own purposes. JP II gives us the key to prevent our relationships from falling into the dark, self-centered waters of utilitarianism. In *Love and Responsibility*, John Paul II said that the only way two persons can avoid using each other is to share the pursuit of the common good together. If the other sees what is good for me and adopts that aim or good for himself, "...a special bond is established between me and this other person: the bond of a common good and of a common aim." This sharing bond unites people internally, making it less likely for the other person to be treated as a means to an end, such as pleasure or gratification.

Friendship is born of a certain equality and inequality. People who are entirely different cannot be friends, but somehow, there must be a bridge between them, a similarity. However, there almost always exists an inequality that is expressed as a mutual attraction, which is an opportunity and willingness to be complemented by the other, the **you**.

### Meeting 3: Who is the YOU?

**Objective:** Evaluate the Covenant of Love that was sealed in matrimony as a means to a fountain of permanent grace, that enables us to deepen our knowledge and appreciation of each other.

#### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment:** Review as an evaluation, not a mere checking that people did it.

**It is suggested that there be commentary regarding the reading assigned at the past meeting,** asking a couple to comment on what caught their attention, or give a brief summary.



#### 3. Content: The Knowledge We Have of the You

*(Note: Remember that the job of the meeting moderator is to present the introduction, which is not a talk. Therefore, the introduction should not exceed 10 minutes. The individual moderators decide on how to present the introduction, taking care to do so in an engaging way. Be sure not to simply supply the material to the group.)*

**To love someone, it is imperative to know them,** and when knowing them we open ourselves to their experience, their values, and discover their kindness and their quality.

**Knowledge of the other's values gives birth to our attraction and interest in them.**

We initially feel attraction because we are "in tune" with the other: we find that we have similar interests and lifestyles, and, secondly, we are attracted by their qualities and values which complement us. We find that this person has some qualities and traits which we lack, and is, as we say, our "better half." **We find joy in the similarities that we discover in the you.** We feel attracted by our differences, by what the other has and we don't. We are attracted by that richness that complements us.

As a relationship is established where admiration for the **you**, the desire for closeness with and attraction to that person, in other words, when **a personal love relationship is established, that same love brings us to more perfect knowledge of the other.**

From that point on, when we love someone we say “I know this person,” and so discover our deep relationship with them. Love then, is much more than “blind;” it is lucid and clear. Love leads us to discover in the other all their richness, brings joy in their companionship, and brings us to express our admiration and gratitude for being the person they are.

Love presupposes personal knowledge. The more we contemplate the person we love, the more we fall in love. And the more we love, the more we know them.

If we examine our spousal relationship retrospectively, we can examine how this process occurred spontaneously and naturally. When did we meet? What attracted us? Why did we fall in love? How were we “in tune?” How did we feel that we complemented or completed each other?

During the initial infatuation stage, and later on, during the engagement period, this knowledge became deeper. The other deeply held our interest, and we longed to know more about them: their history, their dreams, their family, and about their sorrows and joys. Everything about this person we love kept our interest above all else. We could spend endless hours in conversation, and every chat was a new discovery. At times we felt that we could not immerse ourselves completely in their soul, that communication was difficult, and that this person had some feelings and reactions that we could not completely understand. Our joy became even greater when we could again encounter their soul deeply. However, we came to understand that the **you**, at their deepest, **is a mystery: more than we can perceive, and more than words can express.** And this drove us deeper into love.

Does this mystery between us still exist? Do we still have that interest in, and admiration for our first love? Do we still rediscover each other every day? Are we still captivated by the **you** to whom we’ve joined our life?

We have doubtlessly, in our long journey together, experienced disappointments: the **you** (we must painfully admit) possesses elements of darkness as well as light; there are shadows, deficiencies, and faults. Do we allow this reality to overwhelm the image of the one we fell in love with? Or do we continue to admire him, searching intently for the interior treasure of that person? Do we care to know what happens in depths of the other’s soul? What are his deepest sorrows? What are his joys?

What kind of mutual knowledge do we currently enjoy? Can we say that we know know each other “too much?” Is the **you** no longer mysterious to us?

**If we were to say that our spouse is no longer a mystery to us, that would mean that our closeness and intimacy has weakened considerably.** The **you** will always contain a mystery: there is always something new in their soul: new treasures to unearth and previously known treasures to rediscover.

**The knowledge we speak of is always full of admiration and gratitude; it is a knowledge that is grateful for the gift of the other.** This knowledge does not dwell on the weaknesses, limitations and defects of the **you** (after all, who is immune from

them?), but rather this is the knowledge that, above all else, sees the value and greatness of the other.

Finally, there is another dimension to our mutual knowledge. It is one thing to know each other using the light of reason, but it is another thing to know beyond reason, by the light of faith. What eyes do we use to gaze on the **you**? Do we merely see the other as most people do? Do we see them by the light of faith, seeing the deep reality demonstrated in their faith? Do we see them from God's perspective, as the living image of Christ and Mary? Have we uncovered all of their gifts – not merely those natural gifts, but also the divine gifts that live within?

#### 4. Group Discussion:

After the group leader (or another group member) offers the introduction based on the above topic, we move on to the **active part** of the meeting.

The idea is for members to “bring the topic down to where we live,” or address the topic in a very personal way.

Everything that we accomplish in the gaining of our knowledge of the **you** in the natural world will help, later, to analyze our knowledge of Mary. We first study **the realities of the natural world, of our daily lives. This will facilitate our later foray into the supernatural, divine order: divine grace clarifies the natural.** We do not have a dual paradigm, one for dealing with God, and another for dealing with each other.

For the moment, we will dig deeply into the type and degree of mutual knowledge that exists between us as spouses.

The following formats are suggestions, or others may be used. **The important thing is to use some type of discussion format.**

##### 4.1. First Format:

Divide into two groups: one group of women and another group of men.

Each group member responds in writing to the following questions (approximately 5 minutes). It is preferable to have them printed beforehand for distribution.

What kind of things do we feel that our spouses don't really know about us? (We are not speaking of particular spouses, by name, but in general, from what we have seen in our own marriage and in those of others) In other words, what things do our spouses normally not perceive in us?

Given that it is not easy to maintain our admiration for the other, what helps us to maintain it? Are there any habits or actions that help?

Is our knowledge of our partner “comprehensive,” or is it so incomplete as to take us to judgement, or even to complain about the other's faults in front of other people?

Each group shares their answers with each other for 30 minutes.

Following this discussion, both groups come together and a member from each group reports on their discussion, leading to a larger group discussion.

#### **4.2. Second Format**

The following questions are asked of the whole group:

What things do we do to help us get to know each other better? (for example: making time for conversation, etc.)

What gets in the way of our mutual knowledge? (for example, addiction to television, etc.)

Each member responds in writing to the questions (approximately 5 minutes, in silence). After this, the group leader, or another group member, leads a discussion.

In either format, after the discussion, **the results and conclusions of the sharing should be summarized and posted in writing.**

The **group commitment** should be made from the results of the sharing.

#### **5. Post meeting homework:**

Continue reading *Schoenstatt Covenant of Love*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt, and chapter six of *Men, Women and the Mystery of Love*, by Edward Sri.

## Meeting 4: How do we see Mary?

**Objective:** To know Mary better, and to invite people to immerse themselves into her image.

### 1. Opening Prayer

### 2. Review past commitment and the assigned readings from the last meeting

The meeting begins by evaluating our commitment, and with a brief discussion of the assigned reading.

### 3. Content: Our Knowledge of Mary

(Remember to keep the introduction under 10 minutes, and to be creative in the presentation)

Our knowledge of Mary can vary. Certainly, we each know who the Blessed Mother is: the Mother of our Lord, and our mother. We each surely have a relationship with her, whether it be deep or more superficial. Whatever the case, **the aim of Schoenstatt is to uncover all of the riches that the Virgin Mary has for us.** To do so, we do not need to have experienced apparitions or miracles. It suffices us rely on the Word of the Gospel, and our church dogma regarding Mary.

Who is Mary? What is her role in our redemption? Why do we focus especially on her – isn't Christ the most important? How is the person of Mary important in these modern times?

These, and other questions, come to mind when we think of Mary. While in our meetings we could not possibly cover all there is to know about Mary (remember that we always have the opportunity to pursue our own study of Mary outside of our meetings), we can at least immerse ourselves into some of the most important facets of the person of Mary.

What do we know of Mary? A love for Mary flows from coming to know her. And she, as affirmed by theologians, is a living compendium of our faith. In Mary we find all the truths of our faith in a real, familiar, and living way. Gazing upon her, in her, we discover Christ, the mystery of the Incarnate Word and of our redemption. She is the "Gateway to Heaven." She opens our perspective of our God, One and in Three Persons, and she also opens the door of our Church. She is the Mother of God, and Mother of the Church – of the Church's people.

These truths reveal that **the truth of Mary is no accident**, and not a peripheral figure in our faith: **She is, without being the center, at the center of Christianity.** Christ is the

center, but Mary is the one who is closest to Christ – so close that we cannot know Christ without knowing Mary. The Word was made flesh in her womb. She was the one who brought Light to the world. She was the one who accompanied Christ and offered herself with him to the Father at the foot of the cross. She, relying on Christ Redeemer, is the Co-Redeemer. She, united with and relying on Christ the Mediator, is the mediator of all graces. She, at the side of Christ the King and for His glory, is the Queen of the Church, Queen of Angels, Queen of the Universe.

**Schoenstatt makes no false claims about Mary.** We do not embody or cultivate a Marianism built on fantasies. **The truths of our faith suffice for us. However we do wish to unravel the consequences of those truths. If she is Mother of God, Mother of our Lord, Mother of the Church, then we must recognize her as such,** and love her as our own true mother. We must take it to heart that she loves us and knows us as our real mother; we matter to her (how could her children not matter to a mother), she understands us (how could a mother not understand her children?), and she wants to, and is able to help us (how could a mother not want to help her children?).

**She is the Co-Redeemer.** While this expression may seem strange, it is nevertheless true. Each of us is called to co-redeem; the Church co-redeems with the Lord, and we are the Church. Our baptism infuses us with Christ Redeemer, and he, while redeeming us, makes us participants in his redeeming work. It is in this sense that Fr. Kentenich defines Mary thus: **“Mary is the Companion and permanent Collaborator of the Lord in all His redeeming works.”**

What does this mean to us? It means that she aided the Lord in our redemption, and beyond that, it means that **Mary wants to keep helping Him to redeem**, to make his redemption prolific in our times. **Mary requires our help in this task.** She asks us to be her instruments, she wants us to work in the Lord’s vineyard, with her and relying on her. To discover that she is Co-Redeemer and mediator of all graces binds us: it calls us to assume a new attitude about her. We are her children, but also her instruments, her apostles. Like her, we wish to be bearers of Christ for our times.

Mary’s riches are inexhaustible: we could not empty her in our entire lives; over and over we marvel at the things the Lord accomplished in her – remember the Magnificat: with good reason “all generations” shall call her blessed.

How deeply have we entered Mary’s mystery? Once again, you can not love the one you do not know. As we come to know her treasures, we fall in love with her image. From this admiration, attraction, praise and love sprout. We should not worry that God could be jealous of Mary. What pleases an artist more than recognition of his work?

**Mary is God’s masterpiece, the peak of His creation, and the Pearl of the Universe,** “his greatest creation.”

As we seek and find the truth about Mary, that truth brings us to a personal love connection with her, constantly growing in intimacy and ardor. This is why Fr. Kentenich recommends that we **“contemplate her often,”** that we gaze upon her **“with our heart’s eyes,”** in order to discover the rays of light that radiate from her person.

**Each one of us perceives Mary’s treasures in a different way.** Some are attracted by her maternity, others by the image of Mary traveling over the mountain to serve her



cousin Elizabeth, and others by her purity, her faith and unconditional fealty to the Lord, or her filial surrender to God the Father's will. We must, from whatever our personal perspective may be, gaze upon Mary's greatness. We contemplate her and praise God. We make her ours. We love her.

**Coming to know Mary is not solely the result of our dedication and effort.** It is a gift from God, a gift of His grace. Mary, above all creatures, is a mystery – a supernatural mystery beyond the capacity of our reason. We know her by faith. That is why we should ask the Lord to reveal her to us, that he show us his “masterpiece;” that the Holy Spirit enable us to discover all of her richness. We also must ask that the same Spirit lead us to love her as the Lord loved her on earth and continues to love her in Heaven.

#### **4. Group Discussion:**

We offer two formats:

##### **4.1. First Format**

If there are many couples, divide them into three small group, and distribute **three biblical passages that refer to Mary. (Adapt the discussion to the conditions of the group)**

Ask them to carefully read the passage and discuss what it speaks to them, which of Mary's qualities jumped out at them.

Afterwards, the entire group gathers, and someone from each small group reports the important points of their discussion.

**4.2. Second Format** (If this option is not used, we recommend that each couple receive a copy of this text to read on their own.)

Use the same method described above, but all groups will read the following text, taken from the Puebla Document (read carefully in each small group):

(no.292) According to God's plan, in Mary “everything refers to Christ and everything depends on Him.” Her entire being is in full communion with her Son. She gave her “yes” to that loving plan. She freely accepted it at the Annunciation, and was faithful to her word even through the martyrdom at Golgotha. She was the faithful companion of the Lord on all his pathways. Divine maternity brought her to full surrender. Hers was a generous, lucid and permanent gift. Hers was a holy and unique story of love for Christ, culminating in glory.

(no. 293) Mary, brought to the maximum sharing with Christ, is the intimate collaborator in His work. She was “totally distinct from a passively remissive woman, and from alienating religiosity” (MC 37). She is not merely the admirable fruit of redemption; she is also its active agent. In Mary is clearly

found that Christ does not stifle creativity in those who follow Him. She, united with Christ, develops all of her human capabilities and responsibilities, becoming the new Eve at the side of the new Adam. By her free cooperation in history, by her communion and participation, the Immaculate Virgin lives now immersed in the mystery of the Trinity, praising God's glory and interceding for all humanity.

(n.294) Today, when the Latin American Church seeks to take a new step in fidelity towards her Lord, we seek the living figure of Mary. She teaches us that virginity is an exclusive gift to Jesus Christ, in which faith, poverty and obedience to the Lord become fruitful through the action of the Spirit. So also the Church seeks to be mother to all humanity, not at the expense of our love for Christ, distracting from or minimizing Him, but through total and intimate communion with Him. Mary's maternal virginity joins two realities in the mystery of the Church: all of Christ and all with Him, as mankind's servant. Silence, contemplation and adoration are origins of the most generous response to our commission, the most fruitful evangelization of the world.

(no. 295) Mother Mary awakens the brotherly heart that sleeps in every man. In this way, we are drawn to develop the baptismal life by which we were made His children. At the same time, that maternal charism makes our brotherhood grow. This is how Mary makes the Church feel like a family. (DP, 2:292-295)

After the discussion the leader should summarize the most important points, and the group should then **adopt a commitment**. This could be to read a book about Mary, or to visit her in the Shrine.

The **final prayer** could be a this prayer by Michel Quoist, with copies for each couple.

**Michel Quoist from his book "Prayers to Pray in the Street"**

My best invention, says God, is my mother.

I lacked a mother, and I made her for myself.

I made my mother before she made me. So it was assured.

Now I am a man like all men.

I no longer need to be jealous of them, because I have a mother, a real mother.

Yes, I needed that.

My mother is named Mary, says God.

Her soul is absolutely pure and full of grace.

So virginal was her body, and in her dwelt a light so splendid, that while I was in the world I never tired of seeing her, of hearing her, of admiring her.

How lovely is my mother! So much so, that even leaving the marvel of heaven, I never felt exiled while I was beside her.

And know that I know what it is to be carried by the angels..., and well, believe me, it is nothing compared to the arms of a mother.

My mother has died, says God. When I went to heaven, I missed her. And she missed Me.

I have brought her home to Me, her soul, her body, fully whole.

I could not do otherwise. I had to do it thus. It was the logical thing.

How could the fingers that had touched God wither?

How could the eyes that had seen Him close?

And the lips that had kissed Him, do you think they could dry up?

No, that most pure body, that gave body to God, could not rot in the earth.

I could not do it. How could I? It would have been horrible for Me.

Am I not the One in charge? If not, what good is it to be God?

Besides, says God, I did it also for my brethren mankind:

That they may have a mother in heaven, a true mother, like their own, in body and soul.

My mother.

Fine. It is done. I have her here, with me, since the day of her death. Her assumption, as men say.

The mother has returned to find her Son, and the Son His mother, in body and soul, one next to the other, for all eternity.

Oh, if only men could guess at the beauty of this mystery...

They have finally recognized it officially. My representative on earth, the pope, has solemnly proclaimed it.

How pleasing, says God, to see that the gifts that one gives are appreciated!

Although the truth is that the good Christian people had already sensed this mystery of the Son and Brother's love...

And now, says God, take advantage of it.

In heaven you now have a mother who follows you with her eyes, with her eyes of flesh.

In heaven you now have a mother who loves you with all her heart, her heart of flesh.

And that mother is mine. She looks at Me with the same eyes with which she sees them, she loves Me with the same heart.

Oh, if men were scoundrels, they would surely take advantage.

How could they not notice that I cannot deny her anything?

What do you expect? She is my mother! I wished it so.

And well... I do not regret it.

One next to the other, body and soul, eternally Mother and Son...

## 5. Post Meeting Homework:

- Read *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt, Outline VIII, p 73-88.
- Read Attachment A. **Mary in the New Testament** (p. 65)

**Meeting 5:** What is Father Kentenich’s vision of Mary, his Great Ally?

**Objective:** Deeply explore, through various citations, Fr. Kentenich’s vision of Mary.

**1. Opening Prayer**

**2. Review past commitment and assigned reading**

**3. Introduction**

**Video of Fr. Gerold Langsch: What is the Covenant of Love:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usWyqSE-wz0&feature=share&list=PL98D2C7FDCA65037E>

**4. Content:**

**A. The experience of Mary in Father Kentenich’s life**

Father Kentenich himself makes an impressive comment regarding his consecration to Mary as a child: “... The event that the essay calls ‘Consecration to the Blessed Mother,’ ignited the life of a nine year old boy and developed over the years. I do not yet wish to draw the curtain that envelops this mystery. If it is to be called ‘Consecration to the Blessed Mother,’ it should be noted that it made a special impression. Future historians will easily show that the entire Work of Schoenstatt could be found seminally in that consecration.”

**B. Mother Mary, Companion, Collaborator with Jesus in His Redemptive Work**

Rather than present a theological discourse, we want to cite the words that our founding Father said in Argentina, bound for exile, that show Mary’s fundamental activity as companion of and collaborator with Jesus in his Redemptive Work. This has been the Church’s experience of her throughout history.

“She is also a lifeline sent by God, ‘Ecce Mater Tua’ (Behold your Mother). In other words, this means that we must seal a Covenant of Love with the Mother of God. Sadly, these things have been forgotten, therefore leading to a certain mediocrity. Religiosity no longer teaches us, mere ideas no longer teach us. Ultimately, man is only

formed and perfected by surrender to one person: only through surrender to the person of God will we be transformed.

Who is the Mother of God? She remains totally available to the most selfless surrender, and to the person and work of the Savior. And what does she desire? She wishes for me to be linked to her person, she desires the Covenant of Love with me.

Consider this image... whether one knows how to swim or not, if one falls into the water and is trapped by a whirlpool, how could one escape it? I give my heart to the Mother of God, but no longer consider it organically. Yet I know that God, intentionally and through secondary methods, wishes to bring me to Him. I can then say that the Mother of God's love, Mary's heart, is a whirlpool. What kind of whirlpool? A whirlpool of Christ, a whirlpool of the Father. If I am trapped by the whirlpool, I will arrive at God in a faster and deeper way than if I had not fallen into it. It is no longer possible to leave the Father, I am simply caught up in the whirlpool. This is Schoenstatt's message, these are the graces of our pilgrimage."

### **C- Schoenstatt's Marian Mission**

When Father Kentenich turned 73 years old, he said something very significant: referring to St. Paul and his mission, he said that "it was to announce the mystery of Christ." Father then asked himself: "what was the mission entrusted to me 73 years ago? My mission was and is to announce to the world the mystery of the Blessed Virgin. My work is to proclaim the Holy Mother, to make her known in our times as Christ's permanent Collaborator in all of His Work of Redemption, as the Co-Redeemer and Mediator of grace; the Most Holy Virgin united deeply with Christ, and whose specific mission that she, from her Shrine, has for our times."

In 1933, referring to our reasons for linking ourselves to the Shrine, he said: "What shall our response be? I believe! I believe in the great Mystery of Schoenstatt. I believe that in our times the Blessed Virgin has established herself here, to bring the hearts of men to herself, in order to conform them to her Divine Son."

## **5. Discussion**

What is new about Fr. Kentenich's vision of the Covenant of Love with Mary?

What do you think about the role the Blessed Mother has in the American Church?

## **6. Closing Prayer**

## **7. Post meeting Homework**

Read from "200 Questions about Schoenstatt": questions 67-69

## Meeting 6: The Importance of Communication

**Objective:** To understand the importance of communication, in order to grow in love.

### 1. Opening Prayer.

### 2. Review past commitment and assigned reading.

### 3. Introduction: (Group leaders summarize)

After deepening our knowledge of the **you** and of the person of Mary, we now **examine another means to growing love: communication**. Love is maintained and fed to the degree in which we cultivate a deep communication. We first will concentrate on communication between spouses, and later we will later examine our communication with Mary.

Experience shows that **the quality of married life greatly depends on communication between spouses**. We feel that our marriage is going well when we feel that we are communicating, when we have moments of deep communion.

**All love grows in sharing and communication**. If it is absent or merely superficial, then love slowly cools; that “interior tuning” that existed before and made us happy gets lost.

In our times **deep communication between people** (the communion of hearts) **is a rare gift**. It clear that, as never before, today there exists an abundance of communication media: the telephone (not only the household landline, but the cellular phone is with us everywhere), the fax machine, beepers, e-mail, the internet, etc. We surely cannot complain about this, but deep communication, the communion of hearts, becomes more rare every day.

**We are submitting the excesses of our times all too often**. The hustle and bustle of daily life, stress, multiple jobs and responsibilities, and constant media bombardment impede our deep contemplation. Contemporary man is solitary: a solitary man in the

midst of the masses and chaos; a solitary man captivated by the television or computer screen.

**Our usual excuse is “we have no time.”** What we really are saying that we have no time for the most important thing, but plenty of time for a wide variety of other things. We have time to ingest television ads, we have time for sporting events, for soap operas, for so many things.

We do not communicate. We do, however, talk, although there are marriages that barely speak, but they are the exception. The vast majority of couples speak quite a lot: about the children, about vacations, about shopping, about what happened to so and so, etc. We speak much, but barely communicate.

When we speak of a lack of communication, we are referring to a lack of knowing how to listen to each other, trying to understand (putting oneself in the other’s shoes) what the other is trying to say, receptively welcoming what the other is trying to communicate, the comprehension of what words can not say.

Communication is also trying to understand, respond, adding of ourselves, **constructively contributing** to our life exchanges, building that **“our world”** that is the best expression of our living love.

We know that **communication is not limited to mere words**. We also communicate with looks, gestures, with our entire beings. Even the way we are seated in front of each other is a manifestation of our communicative (or incommunicative) attitude. We know also that, in married life, the conjugal relationship is a form of communication. It should be: because the simple physical act, if it does not spring from the soul, is inauthentic, empty, and draining.

The lack of contact, stated Fr. Kentenich, is the great chasm of our culture. Will we overcome this evil? Will we create a culture of true personal communication, ruled by the communion of hearts, that “being one in the other” that our Lord so desires? Will we overcome the “mechanism of separation” in which people live in mere juxtaposition, without interior communication – even living one against the other, or even doing without the other?

**If we wish to reach a state of real contact with the divine reality**, if we hope to achieve communication with the people of the supernatural world, then **the natural order must be healed**. It is not possible to “jump” from the natural to the divine. There must be a harmony between both worlds, an “organic” union, according to Fr. Kentenich. However, we will address this later. During this meeting, we will concentrate on improving the quality of our matrimonial communication.

## 4. Group Discussion:

### 4.1. First Format

**“Brainstorm”** about the different types of communication that exist. For example, “informal,” communication, “spontaneous” communication, “flirting,” “caressing,” or the



“deepest” kind of communication where we feel comfortable in talking about ourselves, about our feelings, joys and frustrations, etc.

As different types are mentioned, they are recorded on a paper chart.

After recording, the group votes on which two seem to be the most important, and follows with a discussion about what makes each type of communication easy or difficult.

#### **4.2. Second Format**

Following the introduction, the group is divided in two. Each group develops and presents a short skit demonstrating the types of communication that are found in marriage.

After the discussion, as in each meeting, the group adopts a **commitment**. The commitment ensures that we do not simply remain stuck in our good intentions, but rather that we work on creating a new way of life. This is not accomplished, especially in our realm, without concrete work of self formation.

### **5. Post meeting homework:**

- Read Attachment B: Interpersonal Communication, p. 72.
- Read **and Reflect on** Father Nicolás Schwizer’s brief vignettes on Marital Dialog (No. 85-86)

<http://www.schoenstatt.org/en/resources/periodicals/virtual-retreat.htm>

## Seventh Meeting: Our Communication with Mary

**Objective:** Increase our awareness that prayer is communication **with SOMEONE** (God the Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, and Mary).

### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.

### 3. Introduction

Watch the following video about Mary, our Blessed Mother:

<http://youtu.be/IFZSwOg84YQ>

### 4. Content:

We may begin with a simple question as our introduction. For example, how would I characterize my communication with God or with the Blessed Mother?

Do not exceed 10 to 15 minutes.

Just as **communication has a central role in the growth of love** in a couple's relationship, we similarly **grow in our contact with the divine world to the extent in which we "speak" with God**. Just as there are many types of communication in the natural world, it is the same with God and the Blessed Virgin.

If we wish to grow closer to God, it is not enough to simply know Him better, or to read about Him, etc. We must, at the same time, find a way to establish a personal relationship with God, to communicate through prayer, meditation, adoration, etc.

It is critical that we highlight the **importance of physical environment to prayer**, the importance of the place and time in which we pray. The environment, our attitude and posture all facilitate or hinder our communication with God. For example, it is difficult to pray if the television is on, or if I am “dead tired.” If one is not in the habit of meditation, this must be approached a step at a time. We should begin, for example, by setting aside 10 minutes every day, and increasing this time slowly until we reach a daily dose of half an hour (or more) of meditation.

Many find that an encounter with God and with the Blessed Mother becomes easier when they have a **small Mary** corner, or Home Shrine, in their room or workplace, where they place an image of her, a crucifix, and other symbols that create an environment conducive to their encounter with God.

Beyond a daily “check in” regarding our day with Mary, one should cultivate a habit of spontaneous prayer expressed as **a simple chat with her during the day with a short phrase** of praise, petition, gratitude, or a petition for forgiveness. If we are doing something, we may, for example, call on her to say, “Mother, help me,” “I offer this up to you,” “thank you for your kindness,” “forgive me, My Queen,” or whatever comes from the heart. At times we do not even need words, but a simple loving glance at her image, or a gesture of salutation, etc. Our prayer might also be a gesture: lighting a candle, or placing a flower in front of her image, etc. This is how we cultivate the language of love.

During this meeting we will delve into the different types of prayer, which ones we know best, and the ways to use them better.

**What types of prayer exist?** There are many ways to converse with God. We remember some of the most important ways:

- **Read or recited prayer.** For example, the Rosary, the Salve, “Heavenwards” prayers, etc.;
- **Meditative prayer:** when we pause to reflect upon and contemplate a mystery of the Lord or of Mary;
- **Spontaneous prayer:** “lifting one’s soul to God”, making contact and speaking the words that spring from our heart with Him, perhaps sporadically, or mid-day, or simply relaxing with God.
- **Prayer of “stillness”:** simply being in contact with the Lord or Mary in a “heart to heart” fashion, without the use of words or thought.
- **Gestural prayer:** many times our prayer is most eloquent when we simply use gestures instead of words. For example: kneeling, or placing hands in a prayerful posture, etc. Our gesture reinforces, promotes, or simply expresses our interior attitude of prayer.

We might practice some or all of these types of prayer, or others. The important thing is for each of us to discover our personal way to relate to the Blessed Virgin. We should take advantage of the Shrine, our privileged place for increasing our communication with Mary.

## 5. Group discussion:

We suggest that the couples do a small “exercise” of meditative prayer known as Lectio Divina, which is not widely known and practiced. To do this, you may read a Gospel text, and then discuss it using the following guidelines:

- Re-tell the text: what does it specifically say?
- What are the fundamental truths in the text?
- How does the text speak to me?
- How do I respond to the Lord?

You might also choose to meditate upon an important life event, etc

To prepare for this prayer exercise, look through the following sources of information:

<http://ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/what-lectio-divina>

<http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>

[http://www.qvdays.org/pdf/lectio\\_divina.pdf](http://www.qvdays.org/pdf/lectio_divina.pdf)

**Commitment:** The group should make a definite commitment to a form of prayer.

## 6. Post meeting homework:

- Read article “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Art and Practice of Lectio Divina” from USCCB, in Appendix 3, or from website

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/word-of-god/upload/lectio-divina.pdf>

- Read “Prayer in the Domestic Church,” and consider the reflection questions. (Appendix 3)

- Read “Short, Spontaneous Prayers That Really Work,” by Father Robert Spitzer, S.J. (Appendix 3)

## Meeting 8: Praying the Holy Rosary

An excellent method to grow in your communication with God

**Objective:** Deepen our communication with the Blessed Mother and teach how to pray the Holy Rosary

Hold a group Rosary workshop

### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.



### 3. Content (summarize)

Continuing the topic of communication with the Blessed Mother, we should highlight the importance of acquiring the habit of increasing the amount of time spent daily to review our day with her.

This Marian “**life review**” or “**life meditation**” is quite

simple and similar to the previous meeting’s exercise:

We elect, in accordance with our nature and the pace of our life, a particularly adequate moment: normally at the beginning or end of each day. We should find a place where we will not be disturbed (if we can not do this in our own home); we might go to the Shrine, or a nearby church or chapel.

**We invoke the Holy Spirit’s guidance and illumination**, asking to see our life through the eyes of God. We turn to Mary, asking that she be with us as we go over our life experience with her.

Next, we **briefly retell the most important events of our day**, both positive and negative. From these, we elect something that has particularly touched us. We ask

ourselves what God means to tell us, recalling how Mary “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2: 19).

Depending on the event we are meditating about, deeper reflection may be necessary at times: others may simply require a continued deep focus, attitude of gratitude, a petition for forgiveness, etc.

Should it be hard to concentrate, we may **resort to a written meditation**, directed at Mary as if we were writing a her a letter.

At the end of the meditation, **we briefly restate our meditation** and seek to draw a concrete life application or purpose from it that we can use the following day.

We should not fret about whether our prayer is directed to God the Father, to Christ, or to Mary. I can speak to God with Mary, I can speak to her directly, or speak to the Lord through her. This will vary according to my current spiritual state or according to what the Holy Spirit breathes into my soul. It is normal to go through stages where a different person of the Holy Trinity or the person of Mary is predominant in our prayer, while the others remain implicit in our intention.

**We should not be surprised if this is a slow process.** It also is so in our human communication. As stated before, this is more difficult if we have not previously made much progress on this level. It is important to start the journey. **We must undertake the journey and beg God for the grace of a personal and intimate encounter with the Blessed Virgin Mary.** Our faith must become more lively, since we only “see” her through the eyes of faith. That faith tells us that she is present, at our sides, always willing to listen and to show us the way of the Lord; as in Cana, when she told the servants “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2: 5)

Doubtlessly, when the group discussed communication in a marriage, we arrived at the conclusion that “giving ourselves time” is an essential condition. The same applies here: **we must give time to Mary; we must make time to spend with her:** time to listen and to answer, time to ponder in our hearts her messages and signs given throughout our lives. We must give of our time to her to incorporate her into our thoughts, our family life, and work.

Friendship grows through discussion and communication. Without this, friendship slowly cools and we lose that interior “tuning” that characterizes those who love each other.

If this is true in our natural world, so it is also in our relationship with God and the Blessed Mother. Mary wishes to grow close to us, but it is our responsibility to pay attention to her. We must learn to know her language and respond to her.

In Schoenstatt we have a home: the Shrine, where Mary always awaits us to give us all that we need. We must cultivate the experience of meeting her, as children, in the Shrine in order to have a communicative experience with Mary.

#### 4. Post Meeting Homework and Commitment:

- Many wonderful meditations can be found in the following book, available in pdf, book form, or from the internet: *Preparation for Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary for Families*.  
<http://www.sjtheworker.org/consecrationtojesus/PreparationTotalConsecration.pdf>
- Read a book about Mary:
  - o The Catholic Companion to Mary, by Mary Glavich, 2007
  - o Marian Thoughts. Pope Benedict XVI, 2007.
  - o Meet Mary- Getting to Know the Mother of God, by Mark Miravalle, 2007.
- Reflect on the following text by the Holy Father from his Letter “Rosarium Virginis Mariae,” and pray, with the family, one Mystery of the Rosary at least once before the next meeting.
- From Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, by Pope John Paul II

#### The family: Parents.

41. Besides being a prayer for peace, the Rosary is always, and has always been, a family prayer, and for the family. In the past, this prayer was particularly treasured by Christian families, and it certainly upheld their communion. It is best to not take this precious heirloom for granted. It is necessary to return to family prayer, and to pray for families, using this form of prayer.

If in the Apostolic Letter **Novo Millennio Ineunte** I have encouraged the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours by the laity in the normal life of parish communities and Christian groups, so also I desire to do the same with the Rosary. These are two paths that are not alternatives, but complements in Christian contemplation. I ask, therefore, that those who are dedicated to the shepherding of families to recommend with conviction the praying of the Rosary.

The family that prays together stays together. The Holy Rosary, by tradition, is a prayer that lends itself to uniting the family. Contemplating Jesus, each family member re-acquires the capacity to look into each other’s eyes, to communicate, to grow in solidarity, to mutually forgive, and to start again in a Covenant of Love renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Many of the problems of contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, have their roots in a growing difficulty in communication. It is increasingly difficult to spend time together, and during those rare moments of togetherness, the television claims our attention. To return to praying the Rosary as a family means to introduce very different images from the Salvation mystery into daily life: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his Most Holy Mother. The family that prays the Rosary together partly replicates the setting of the Nazarene house: Jesus is in the center, and

we share our joys and sufferings with Him. We place our needs and chores in His hands, and we receive hope and strength for the journey from Him.

### **And the children**

42. How beautiful and fruitful to also entrust the development of our children to this prayer. Is not the Rosary the itinerary of the life of Christ, from His birth, to His death, to His resurrection and glory? These days it is increasingly difficult for parents to keep track of their children as they pass through different stages in life. In today's society with its advanced technology, social networking and globalization, everything has accelerated, and every day the generational gap widens even more. All kinds of messages and the most unpredictable experiences can create fissures in the lives of children and adolescents, causing much anguish for parents as they confront the dangers facing their children. Parents must frequently confront strong disappointments, witnessing the failures of their children in the face of drugs, unabashed hedonism, temptations of violence, and in other ways that are senseless and desperate

Praying the Rosary for our children, and better yet with our children – teaching them from a young age to take the daily family “prayer interval” – is not the certain solution to all problems, but it is a spiritual aid, the importance of which can not be minimized. One might object that the Rosary is an inadequate prayer, given the tastes of children and youth today, but this objection might be based in a careless approach to praying it.

While sticking to the Rosary's fundamental structure, there is nothing to keep our youth from praying it –both in family and in groups – in a richer way, adding symbols and practices that enrich the experience. Why not try? A passionate, creative and optimistic Youth Minister – World Youth Days have provided ample examples of them – is capable of adding, with God's help, truly helpful and significant steps to Rosary prayer that the youths themselves will surprise adults more every day by making this prayer their own and reciting it with youthful enthusiasm.

**It is suggested that during the next meeting, before proceeding with the topic (Showing Love through Action), that couples be given more of the history of Schoenstatt, perhaps adding another meeting.**



## **Ninth Meeting: The “Proof” of Love** **Showing Love through Action**

**Objective:** Examine loving deeds or gestures as a way to grow in love.

### **1. Opening Prayer**

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.

### **3. Content (summarize)**

In this meeting we will address the third aspect in the growth of spousal love and of Mary: namely to **show love through deeds**, with small sacrifices that express and testify to our commitment.

A primary experience of love is the discovery that **when we truly love someone, that love brings us outside of ourselves**. It is a kind of ecstasy that takes us out of our inner self, driving us from within to show our love by the gift of self, even to the point of forgetting our own interests and desires. We focus on the **you**, on what pleases or is needed by the other. **Love tends to intrinsically prove itself through gift**.

It could not be otherwise, as we were made in the image of God and the Holy Trinity, which is the mystery of infinite giving between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This intra-Trinitarian love gushes to us in creation, and found its ultimate expression in the sending of the Word of God to the world: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3: 16).

In God’s image, we are made to love. However, **it is difficult for us to set our little selves aside**, it is hard for us to give of ourselves, and we often fail to perceive the desires and needs of others, because we are too often full of ourselves.

Original sin and other sins have burdened our hearts with an inclination toward our selfish and miserly self.

With that in mind, **to make way for love, a conscious self denial must be born in us, a necessary freeing from that which binds us** in our own little castles. Fr. Kenterich stated; “Modern man is way too comfortable to truly love... he does not undertake the chore of captivating, and merely wishes to receive.... he only seeks to enjoy, enjoy and

enjoy.” We also are children of our times. It is hard for us to love even though we want others to love us. It is hard for us to practice the basic denial required for love to flower in our souls.”

**Our married life presents countless opportunities to verify these truths.** If we look back at the times of infatuation and betrothal, we can remember how love for the other moved us to renounce many things; we can recall how we were capable of any sacrifice to be with the person we love; we would undertake any quest to satisfy their desires. Later, during married life, as years passed, we separated our sacrifices and self-denial from that love. They became increasingly heavy crosses, at times impossible to stomach. At the same time, our nature, damaged by original and personal sin, and weighed down by egoism and individualism, “distracts” us from love and from our surrender to the **you**, our spouse. If we are no longer attentive to what our spouse desires, to what pleases them, to their unspoken needs and wants. **If we have abandoned that solicitous love that assumes placing the self second, then love will necessarily diminish,** the relationship will cool to the point of extinguishing.

On the other hand, **if we understand how to place the other first,** if we truly desire their happiness above all else, **then love will grow,** it will renew daily. Putting the other first requires a disposition to denial: of our tastes, of our comfort, of our paradigm. We may be willing to perform “great sacrifices” for our spouse, but the issue is the “small sacrifices.” These are decisive.

We should not merely think of sacrifices and denial: we should simply concentrate on small proofs of our love: anniversary gifts, unexpected surprises, words of gratitude for what the other has done, etc. These small things renew our love, bring a new dimension to our lives, and bring our hearts closer. Every day is a day to start loving.

#### 4. Group Discussion

Each member should answer the following questions in writing:

- How would I show my love to my spouse during our period of initial infatuation?
- How do I show it today? What have I maintained? What have I stopped doing?

The large group then shares about the topic.

#### 5. Commitment for the Next Meeting:

If we reflect on all that our spouse does for us and for the family during each day, our love and gratitude for the other will grow. Write a detailed list of everything that the spouse does in a day.

After writing the list, reflect on how we value each thing, and how we show our gratitude. Finally, examine what we can do better in this regard.

Each couple should discuss and share their lists and reflections.

## **6. Reading for the Next Meeting:**

*The Covenant of Love in Daily Life; Introduction to Schoenstatt*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, pp 30-37.

## Meeting 10: Our concrete love for Mary

**Objective:** Find an original way to **show** and nourish, **by deeds**, our love for Mary.

### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.

Moderators may ask willing couples to share their experience of the past commitment.

### 3. Group Activity

Prior to presenting the introduction, the moderator invites the group to participate in an activity that will require magazines, religious images, scissors, glue, and poster board.

Divide the group in two. Each group will make a collage illustrating (1) how love is shown through deeds in the natural world; and (2) how it is shown in the supernatural world. Spend 15 minutes on the collages, then share them with the large group.

Following the activity, present the meeting content.

### 4. Content (summarize)

Living the Covenant of Love with Mary enables a profound transformation in our interior self, because love will move us to make small gifts to Mary, and because it will bring us to a serious attitude of self denial and sacrifice.

We speak of “small” gifts to Mary, showing “small” proofs of our love, because at the beginning of this journey we are not asked to constantly give the maximum expression of love. Besides, behind each of these small examples of love is hidden a great secret: those who love recognize the importance of small details. Those who do not love are not aware of this. Recall how our Lord, in His Gospel, praised the servant who know how to be faithful in little things: “Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness.” (Mt 25: 23). Elsewhere, He adds: “Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great; anyone who is dishonest in little things is dishonest in great ones.” (Lk 16: 10)

Nor does Mary primarily ask great and mighty deeds from us. What she desires is our heart, and this is shown, at times, in the small and seemingly insignificant. These small self-denials and tokens of love will strengthen our capacity for love until, at the right moment, our love for her indeed asks for greater denial and heroic deeds.

If we wish to achieve a strong and ardent love for the Blessed Mother, we must learn to demonstrate our love through small things, and, at the same time, we must learn to walk the path of self-denial and sacrifice. We would do well to purposefully make sacrifices according to what spiritually ails us, rather than make choices that unnecessarily shackle our own unique nature. This leads us to surrender our comforts, denying ourselves choices/activities that may hinder us from setting aside time for prayer and rejecting those things that enslave us. We then gain wings to grow in love and closeness with God and Mary and in surrender to our brother.

As a matter of fact, it is this “surrender to our brothers” that best proves our love for Mary, as well as for God, whom we can see through faith. These brothers of ours, who are in the image of Mary, are children of Mary, who loves them maternally. We can, therefore, show our love for her through an apostolic surrender to her children, serving them and caring about them in her name, as if we were doing it for her.

Herein lies the meaning of the Lord’s words: “In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me,” (Mt 25: 40) and of Saint John: “Anyone who says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, is a liar, since whoever does not love the brother whom he can see cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 Jn 4: 20).

The goal of our “self-denials” and “proofs” of love is to free us to love the Lord and Mary, to love them truly through our brothers, and to become better instruments through our care and selfless giving or surrender to them. This is how Mary lives in us, and also re-lives in us her own journey over the mountain to her cousin Elizabeth’s home, or her concern at the wedding feast in Cana about the lack of wine. Mary’s rush to help in all cases of human need is her apostolic testimony that we should emulate. This becomes for us an imperative: to bring many to the Shrine to seal a Covenant of Love with her.

As we shed our self-centeredness and learn to love, we make a home for Mary in our hearts. She will come to reside in our home, she will stay with us, and she will light our lives with the light of Christ, which will then shine from within us.

## **5. Post-meeting Homework**

All group members will choose a person from their family, the group, or their workplace to demonstrate their love of Mary, through that person.

Pose the following questions:

Who should I choose? What specific actions should I use?

What Marian attitude do I wish to adopt while I do this?

**SUGGESTION:**

This is an opportune time to suggest that each couple find a pleasing image of the Mother Thrice Admirable, and install this in their home accompanied by the group, using an appropriate liturgy. This is not the creation of a home shrine; rather, it is about creating a holy way of incorporating the Image of Grace into our homes.

**6. Reading for the Next Meeting:**

Read *The Covenant of Love in Daily Life; Introduction to Schoenstatt*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, pp 1-29.

## Eleventh Meeting: The Capital of Grace

**Objective:** Know the origin and development of the Capital of Grace in the history of Schoenstatt.

### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.

Begin this discussion with questions about the placement of the Mother Thrice Admirable images in our homes, and what we experienced.

### 3. Activity

Ask each person to write a short and simple explanation, based on the reading, about what they understood about contributions to the Capital of Grace.

Write for a couple of minutes, then collect and read to the group, without discussion.

### 4. Content: (summarize)

The purpose of this meeting is to delve deeper into the previous topic: proving love by deed, by small sacrifices. Schoenstatt places great importance on this dimension of love. Its origin and spiritual touchstone, the Shrine, is essentially bound to what Fr. Kentenich called “contributions to the Capital of Grace”. We will concentrate on this point.

**“I have no other hands but yours.”**

In the Church of Saint Ludger, in the German city of Munster, which was devastated by various bombings during the war, there is a crucifix on which the arms of Christ have been burned. The following phrase is inscribed into the wood: “I have no other hands but yours.” It was in front of this Christ that the converted Jew, Edith Stein, who died in Auschwitz, decided to join the Carmelite order.

**This same phrase is echoed by the Blessed Mother from our Shrine: “I have no other hands but yours to bring my Son’s Kingdom to life among you.”**

**Schoenstatt takes our Lord and Mary's need of our cooperation very seriously.**

Therefore, when we make a pilgrimage to the Schoenstatt Shrine, we encounter something unique: "the field of black crosses." Next to the original Shrine are located the tombs of Schoenstatt members who died during the first and second World Wars, who heroically offered their lives to Mary for the growth of her cause. Other Shrines will have at least one cross, or a monument in memory of Joseph Engling, the first of these martyrs of Schoenstatt. At Bellavista, next to the Shrine, Mario Hiriart is buried. He wished to completely consecrate himself to be, in Mary's hands, a "living Chalice," offering his work and life to bring Christ to mankind.

Josef Engling, Mario Hiriart and many others are a testimony to the same fact: Schoenstatt thrives on what we call "contributions to the Capital of Grace." It has been this way from the beginning. Schoenstatt's Covenant of Love with Mary contains a unique model that Fr. Kentenich captured in the expression: "Nothing without you, nothing without us." This "nothing without you" precisely states our participation in the Covenant.

**Schoenstatt did not simply spring from Mary's initiative: man's cooperation is essentially intertwined in its origin.** This is how Schoenstatt differs from other pilgrimage sites, because in the absence of Marian apparitions or miracles, our own participation, along with God's, is highlighted.

Our founder carefully observed the signs of the times, actively searched for God's will, and invited the youth that surrounded him to dare with him: "We could not," according to the the First Founding Document, "leave our successors a more precious inheritance than inducing our Sovereign Lady to erect her throne here, to share her treasures and perform special miracles of grace."

**The way of "inducing" Mary was clear: we would prove with deeds that we truly love her.**

Father stated, "It seems to me that our Lady, in these times, in the ancient Chapel of Saint Michael, speaks these words to us through the mouth of the Archangel: 'I love those who love me. Prove to me first, with deeds, that you truly love me and that you are serious about your commitment. Through faithful compliance of your duty, and by an intense prayer life, earn many merits, and place them at my disposal. I will then gladly establish myself in your midst, and shall distribute abundant gifts and graces. Then from here I shall attract youthful hearts toward me, and I will educate them to be useful instruments in my hand.'"

Fr. Kentenich therefore called upon the Family to be Mary's collaborating hands at her Shrines to further the Marian reign of God the Father on earth.

**This law of "nothing without us" not only guided the birth of Schoenstatt, but also its development.** "Every kingdom is preserved by the same forces that brought them about." (Salustio, a Roman historian) Therefore, Fr. Kentenich, referring to the Capital of Grace in the Second Founding Document – at the 25th anniversary of the foundation of Schoenstatt – could clearly state, "The existence of our family is owed to the contributions to the Capital of Grace of our Mother Thrice Admirable. This is why we



should immutably maintain them for all time; it is from contributions to the Capital of Grace that the Family rises or falls." (Documents of Schoenstatt, P. 115, N° 96).

**What, then, is the Capital of Grace?** We can now offer a general answer: **it is our participation in the Covenant, our collaboration with Mary.** Precisely, the Capital of Grace consists of placing the intentions of our prayers, our good deeds and our sacrifices in Mary's hands, in order for her to establish herself in the Shrine and from there attract and instruct many apostles of the Lord, builders of a new society.

**It is the giving of all that we do to effectively live as Christians.**

**The Capital of Grace, then, is not only handing over my sorrows and painful efforts,** but also giving all that is mine, including my joys, and the treasure and talents that God and the Blessed Mother have placed in my hands.

The Capital of Grace is indeed the efforts and concrete gifts that are given, but must become **"everything that I am and have."** We must eventually come to give Mary all of our actions and attitudes. All that we are or have, all that we do, everything is given to Mary at the Shrine, placed there at her disposal. The Capital of Grace does not consist of "hoarding treasures for myself," in order to win a place in the heavenly host. Rather, it is to generously, humbly, and nobly place them in her hands. We therefore pray:

My Queen, my Mother, I give myself entirely to you, and to show my devotion to you, I consecrate to you this day, my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, my entire self without reserve. As I am your own, my good Mother, guard and defend me as your property and your possession.  
Amen.

Schoenstatt Covenant Prayer

The life of our Shrines, their fruitfulness, as stipulated on our day of foundation, depends decisively on our contributions to the Capital of Grace.

We present these loving gifts to Mary with finality. They are not offered primarily for "my salvation," so that "my ways work out," but so that **the Blessed Mother would feel moved to act from our Shrine,** to attract hearts from there, and to grant them the graces of abiding in God the Father, transformation in Christ, and apostolic fruitfulness.

This is about her acting as a mother who embraces, as a teacher who transforms us, and as a queen who sends apostles to be the heart of the Church and soul of the world.

Therefore, the Capital of Grace is our contribution to the secret of Schoenstatt's life force.

Every covenant requires not only the commitment of one, but also of the other. **Love inspires a response of love.** The Blessed Mother's care for me deserves my collaboration. She calls me, she approaches me, she gives me her love, she wishes to take charge of my formation, to transform me into the image of her Son, and to make

me a participant in the building of the Kingdom. Could I possibly, then, remain inert and immobile, failing to contribute what I have? Every child would respond by giving the best of himself.

If she has focused on me to give me her love, the maximum love humanly possible, how would she not accept my love, weak and sporadic as it may be?

The Capital of Grace is our loving response to her love, our part of the Covenant of Love. By the Capital of Grace we affirm: Mary, nothing without you, but also nothing without us!

During the Second World War our Founding Father invited us to grow our love for Mary, offering abundant contributions to the Capital of Grace as a concrete form of apostolic sanctity. He said "The time is coming in which contributions to the Capital of Grace of our Mother Thrice Admirable may become not only the most important and efficacious Marian apostolate, but perhaps the only ones that we can make. To understand this, we must recall that these contributions are no more and no less than an authentic, serious, and efficacious struggle for our own sanctity in service of the Marian apostolate." (Doc. Schoenstatt, N° 97. Second Founding Document)

This is always **God's teaching: an invitation to be His collaborators in the building of the Kingdom on earth.** He desires our participation for our own good, for the good of our brothers, and for the good of the world.

## 5. Group Discussion

Base the discussion on the following questions:

According to what we have previously discussed, what concrete things do we think are included in the Capital of Grace?

What can we offer the Blessed Mother, throughout our day, other than prayer?

**The moderator should summarize and clear any doubts at the end.**

## 6. Commitment for the Next Meeting

It is suggested that each couple select a topic for self-education, and offer it up as a contribution to the Capital of Grace in somebody's name (such as a child, relative, friend, etc.)

## 7. Reading for the Next Meeting:

Read *The Covenant of Love in Daily Life; Introduction to Schoenstatt 5*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, pp 61-71

**Closing Prayer:** It is suggested to pray Prayer for Offering Morning Prayer from “Heavenwards,” page 24, focusing on the sense of the Capital of Grace.



## Meeting 12: Our Covenant, the journey to our goal

**Objective:** Reach a deeper understanding that marriage is a Covenant of Love, and, as such, is a journey and is sanctified by the Divine **Covenant of Love**.

### 1. Opening Prayer

**2. Review past commitment and brief discussion** about previously assigned reading.

**Note:** The introduction based on the content follows. You might ask a qualified couple to present it, or perhaps a priest (even if he is not from Schoenstatt).

### 3. Content: (summarize)

As we've prepared for our Covenant, we have, at the same time, deepened our marital love, and consequently, our love for Mary. We do this understanding that attachments made in the natural world are expressions, paths, and mirror of the attachments of the divine world. Both types of attachments, according to Fr. Kentenich, are related and mutually conditional. If we love God, that God brings us to love our brothers, because in them we love God. From a psychological point of view, brotherly love – loving all we see – demonstrates the authenticity of our love for God, Who we do not see with our senses.

Such considerations have inspired our preparation for our Covenant of Love with Mary. The covenant that we live in the world of natural attachments helps us to live in profound covenant with Mary, and through her with the Lord and Holy Trinity. To grow in love – as covenant - presupposes knowledge of the **you**, communication, and proof of love through deeds, through small sacrifices.

While remaining in this perspective, **it is time to take a step further. Specifically, we now go deeper into the meaning of covenant.** We will now start from the divine order, from the revelation given through the Word of God, the Bible.

**The word “covenant” expresses the fundamental plan found throughout the history of salvation.** The Covenant of Love with Mary at the Shrine is inspired by the Covenant of Love that God undertakes with humanity, as stated in Sacred Scripture. Since this is not an invented or different covenant, it has the same traits and follows the same rules of the covenant of God with humanity throughout the history of salvation. How might these traits be characterized so that they would be always apparent, so that they can be understood? The traits could be, perhaps, condensed into three: first,

**God's covenant with humanity is a freely given initiative of God's; in the second place, it is always a mutual commitment; and in the third place, it carries the seal of irrevocable fidelity.** We now examine the meaning of each of these points.

In the first place, God's Covenant of Love, throughout the history of salvation, the Covenant of Love, **is a freely given initiative of God's.** In other words, God always acts first. When we say that He acts first, we mean it chronologically. He takes the initiative, He is the one who begins the dialogue. God takes the initiative without regard for any previous merit on our part. God indeed freely takes the initiative because **perhaps the only criteria that He uses to choose is the lowliness of the ones He calls; perhaps the only condition He requires to call us, to flow into us, to take the initiative, is the lowliness of the other, that the other recognizes his need yet remains content with his lowliness.**

If we examine, for example, the **covenant of God with Abraham**, it is God who freely bursts into the life of an ordinary person with no apparent special qualities, no special title: he is a desert nomad, who would have been focused on his lands, his idols. God bursts freely and suddenly into the life of Moses, into the life of the people of Israel, and, erasing any doubts, tells them, "Yahweh set his heart on you and chose you not because you were the most numerous of all peoples -- for indeed you were the smallest of all- but because he loved you and meant to keep the oath which he swore to your ancestors: that was why Yahweh brought you out with his mighty hand and redeemed you from the place of slave-labour, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Dt 7: 7-8).

The same could be said of the **Covenant of God with Mary**: "he has looked upon the lowliness of his servant," (Lk 1: 48) says Mary in her Magnificat. This is constantly clear: God takes the initiative. "God loved us first," said St. John (1 Jn 4: 10). God calls us freely, focusing, perhaps, only on the lowliness of the ones that He calls. This sets the tone of the Covenant of Love, and all that follows. **The Covenant of Love is not, therefore, a contract based on justice**, a contract where one postures in front of the other, saying, "I will give so that you can give, and I will give to the same degree that you give to me." A Covenant of Love does not require impeccable behavior; rather, it allows for mistakes, human frailty, and the possibility of human failure. The Covenant of Love is about the generosity of a God who calls us, who call us first, who call us simply "because," because He wants to, because He is rich in mercy.

We must remember this when we analyze the second characteristic of the covenant, which is **mutual commitment**. Truly, God demands a lot when He enters into covenant. Examining the stories of Abraham, of Moses, of the people of Israel, and of Mary – prototypes of the Covenant of Love between God and humanity – **what God demands above all is obedient faith**. He desires an obedient faith and confidence such that man allows himself to be taken wherever God wishes to take him; obedience so great as to abandon one's own land, one's own gods, one's own idols, one's own family, as Abraham, Moses and Mary all had to abandon their own plans for life. This means abandoning everything for the sake of obedience: a servant or slave's attitude, as Mary would profess.

**The obedience of faith essentially renders us “permeable,” or “malleable.”** Man allows himself to be taken, to be led, to be used as an instrument in the most unpredictable ways, on paths he never imagined he would take, as in the case of Abraham, Moses, and Mary.

**Obedience in Faith: “Do unto me according to your word.”** For those called to covenant by God, obedience in faith **always leads** to holocaust (a burnt offering). In other words, all is consumed in the fires of love- a holocaust (offering) of love. So it was with Abraham, who was specifically asked for the sacrifice in burnt offering of his son Isaac. So it was also with Moses, who would have to bear the burdens of the anger of Israel, and to be the guide of a stiff-necked people. And so it was also with Mary who, at first symbolically in the temple, and then in reality at the cross, would have to offer her Son.

**Those called by God to covenant are always called to obedience in faith and to a holocaust of love.** However, perfection, impeccable behavior, and strict justice without tolerance for regression to who we once were are **not** what is expected, but rather an alignment with our God who freely chooses us and asks only, as our part, our lowliness, and a contrite and humble heart. As described by the psalmist in Psalm 51: “My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart you will not scorn.” God seeks a heart that honestly does its best, that trusts in God’s grace, and that answers God’s call, on His terms and in His time. In other words, a humble soul that submits his hands to God’s work. “If Yahweh does not build the house, in vain do its builders toil” (Psalm 127:1). God desires a lowly soul who places everything in the hands of the God Who is Lord of all time, who bestows His grace and His Spirit to those He loves.

**As compensation, God offers** to all that He calls to covenant - of whom He demands obedience of faith, a holocaust of love and a lowly soul - **his companionship**. Again, we recall Abraham, Moses, Israel and Mary: God gives them His companionship, His promise of perpetual help, and his faithfulness. “I will be with you,” “I am El Shaddai,” “I am omnipotent faithfulness,” He said to Abraham. He also told Moses, “I am Who Am, and I will always be with you. I will never leave your side.” And He told Mary, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”

**God promises His constant closeness, His affectionate and vigilant presence. He also promises, however,** something that perhaps means more to the Eastern perspective: **astonishing fruitfulness**. God himself compares His promised fruitfulness to Abraham with the grains of sand of the sea and with the stars of the sky. He promises an astonishing fruitfulness completely out of proportion of any human effort. He promised it also to Moses: the fruitfulness of delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, of leading them through the desert, and of giving to them the land of milk and honey. He also promised it, above all, to Mary: “Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.” (Lk 1: 31-32). Indeed, this is a fruitfulness that relies not on flesh or blood, but rather on the Spirit of God, a fruitfulness absolutely disproportionate to that which human effort could possibly achieve.

**Covenant is characterized by a third seal**, distinguishing it from any other human attachment: **the seal of faithfulness**. “God’s gifts,”– stated St. Paul, reflecting on the mystery of the treason of Judas or Jewish infidelity, “are irrevocable” (Rom, 11: 29). Humankind’s infidelity does not cause God to withhold His gifts. When God calls, He calls forever. His gifts remain forever available – it is up to us whether we accept them or not. It is our choice to make ourselves available to His graces. However, on His part, the covenant remains always open.

God never withdraws his faithfulness, nor is He shocked or disillusioned when mankind turns its back on him. However, **for our part, God invites us to be equally faithful**. God invites us to take part in the most noble exercise of love. He invites us into what Fr. Kentenich called “the pure, unblemished, and tested conservation of the first love: in other words, to give ourselves at once with finality, irrevocably to that which is most noble, the most precious endeavor of the human heart: to love for once and for all.” The Lord spoke of this in the Book of Revelation: “Be faithful, even in death, and I will give you the crown of life for your prize” (Rev 2: 10).

These, then, seem to be the characteristics of God’s Covenant with mankind throughout the history of salvation. **This historical covenant is the prototype and model of the Covenant of Love with Mary at the Shrine. The covenant that we adopt with the Blessed Mother at the Shrine is meant to be a concrete new edition, both historical and original, of the great covenant of God with his people.** The covenant between God and us is meant to be able to break free of the realm of our intellect, to no longer be a story about love from Scripture, but to become a daily reality in the life of every child of God.

## 5. Group Discussion

- Moderator testimonies about their own covenants
- Video clips of Fr. Gerold Langsch - Covenant of Love, Spiritual Striving
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usWyqSE-wz0&feature=share&list=PL98D2C7FDCA65037E>

## 6. Commitment for the Next Meeting

Each person should reflect on how he or she has felt God’s call in his or her life, even up to these moments of preparation for sealing the Covenant in Schoenstatt. What people and events have represented a call from God?

Couples should then share their reflections, and prepare to share them in the next meeting with the group.

## 7. Reading for the Next Meeting:

Read one of the following texts:

- *Schoenstatt Covenant of Love; Introduction to Schoenstatt 4*, by the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, pp 43-62.
- *Message and Mission of Schoenstatt*, by Edith Raidt, pp 120-25.
- *Exchange of Hearts*, by Fr Jonathan Niehaus, Chapters 1-2.

## Meeting 13: The Covenant of Love, a living exchange that gives life

**Objective:** To go deeper in the Covenant of Love with Mary as **an exchange of hearts, of treasure, and of interests with her.**

### 1. Opening Prayer

### 2. Review the purpose, and a brief discussion about the assigned Reading from the previous meeting.

### 3. Content: (summarize)

Our covenant with Mary is a Covenant of Love. When we are united with someone by love, we form, with that person, a narrow communion of hearts, treasures and interests. One is no longer an isolated person, but, through the **attachment of love**, a certain spiritual identification has been created: **the “I” and the “you” becomes “us.”**

**Love forces us to transcend ourselves, and impels us to surrender and to give to the you, creating a communion of love.** Those who love live **as one**, in the other, **with** the other, and **for** the other.

These same laws that govern all noble love, both in the human and divine orders, are implicit in the Covenant of Love with Mary.



**Through the Covenant of Love, we give Mary our hearts, and she gives us her heart.** When we say that we give her our hearts, we mean that we give her what is most deeply our own, our most intimate being. We are telling her that our deepest longings, our destitution and our triumphs, our yearning to be loved and to love, all belong to her.

By our covenant we joyfully confess that we belong to Mary. “I am completely yours,” “totus tuus”. That awareness

remains with us forever once we seal the Covenant of Love. She gives us joy of living and inner peace; she fills our emptiness and heals the feeling of loneliness that overpowers us when we do not feel that we are someone’s, and for someone.



Mary also gives us her heart, with all the warmth and maternal tenderness that characterize her. She holds us in her heart, because we are her favorite little children for whom she suffered labor pains at the cross of the Lord. She very much desires our filial affection, but also wants to hear and know our sorrows and limitations.

What else does a mother demand? What could she, the “Queen of Mercy” and “Refuge of Sinners” want from us?

Abiding in the Heart of Mary exalts and ennobles us. If we love Mary with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, then we can somehow become more like her in our narrow and selfish hearts. These hearts, however fearful and imperfect, open up, are purified and ennobled in her heart: “Your heart is the doorway to heaven.”

Besides fusing our hearts to the heart of Mary, by the Covenant of Love **we share our treasures with her**. Everything that is ours now belongs to her. She also gives us all that is hers.

**What treasures do I have?** Many: **personal and material treasures**. I have physical and intellectual aptitudes, the capacity to decide and undertake; I have a body, my senses, my sight, my ears, and my limbs, hands and feet. We could thus list all of the things that God has given us. By the covenant, through the hands of Mary, I return them to God. I tell her, “all that is mine is yours,” there is nothing that is mine that is not at your disposal; I consecrate my whole being to you. True love does not withhold anything for the self.

Beyond my personal treasures, I also have material treasures. By the covenant, I also give these to Mary: my clothing, my house, my family, my books, my work tools. Everything that I own is hers, and is consecrated to her. **She also gives us her treasures, which are infinitely greater than ours:** her own son, her power, her wisdom, her mercy, and her grace: the Church, her Shrine, her Schoenstatt family. All that she has she shares with me.

Doesn't the covenant enrich us immeasurably? She does not give us material treasures and all that man desires. Rather, she gives us true treasures of heaven, “where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal.” (Mt 6:20) However, she also takes care that we do not lack the material treasures necessary to carry out the work that the Lord has assigned us.

Finally, the Covenant of Love **also is a perfect exchange of interests**. Because of love, the interests and longings of the person we love become our own interests. Because of love, we begin to care about the love of the other, of the things and the people that are important in the other's life. True love always produces an interest in what moves and gives joy to the other, awakening in us a desire to make it our own. We become motivated by that in which we had no previous interest, or which had not attracted us before.

What are the desires of my heart? What moves me and gives meaning to my life? What are my aspirations and goals?

Mary makes them all her own. She teaches us to distinguish between false desires that appeal to our disordered instincts and those that are for our true good. She shares with

us our preoccupation with self-fulfillment, with happiness, with doing something worthwhile with our lives. Since she is our Queen, the “Omnipotent Supplicant,” she helps us to reach our goals without failing on the road.

For our part, **we also adopt her interests: the building of her Son’s kingdom here on earth**, the justification and redemption of mankind, and the unity and vitality of the Church. We collaborate with her maternal care for mankind, the Church, and all of her desires.

**Through the covenant, our horizons and our hearts are broadened.** We rise above our paltry world and open ourselves up to a universal perspective. We do this with the peace and confidence that there is someone who watches over us and who assures that we lack nothing. “Our Mother cares for us perfectly” is the motto that inspires our covenant with Mary. “Nothing without you, nothing without us.”

#### 4. Group Discussion

Divide the group into three small groups, with couples in different groups.

The first group reflects on the meaning of an exchange of hearts with Mary.

When I give her my heart, what am I giving? What, given the reality of my life, do I ask of her?

When I receive the heart of Mary, what is the treasure I receive?

The second group reflects on the exchange of treasures.

What treasures do I give?

What treasures do I receive from her?

The third group reflects on the Exchange of interests.

What are my interests?

What are Mary’s interests?

Allow 30 minutes for small group discussion. After this, one person from each small group will tell the larger group about the most important points of their discussion, allowing for large group comments.

#### 5. Homework for the Next Meeting:

Prepare a short, personal prayer to Mary in which we express our longing to truly give her our hearts, our treasures, and our interests.

Read *Exchange of Hearts*, by Fr Jonathan Niehaus, Chapters 3-4.

# Attachments

## Attachment A

(for use after the 4th meeting)

### Mary in the New Testament

#### 1. The Annunciation to Mary (Lk 1: 26-38)

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor. Behold! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.”

- Mary quietly reflects on her personal encounter with God.
- She is God's chosen one, and is thus full of grace.
- She listens, asks, and believes.
- Her power is love, her freely given surrender, and her confidence in God the Father. As His daughter, she submits unconditionally to His will.
- She becomes the mother of Our Lord.

#### 2. Mary's Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth (Lk 1: 39-45)

“Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb

and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'"

- Mary is "blessed among women." God uplifts all women in her. She is the guarantee of female greatness.
- Mary leaves "as quickly as she could" to help.
- The "Lord's servant" becomes servant of her peers.
- She opens herself to sharing with others their joys and sorrows.
- Her selfless service, given simply and naturally, becomes the fount of divine life: she bears the Christ to her peers.

### **3. Mary sings the Magnificat (Lk 1: 46-56)**

"And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; because he has looked upon the lowliness of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him. He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love -according to the promise he made to our ancestors - of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home."

- Mary empties herself, putting all of her trust in the Father's mercy.
- She recognizes that God has chosen her, in his infinite love, because of her simplicity.
- Mary knows herself as, and feels like God's own, and therefore her heart sings out in joy.
- She knows herself as the child of the Father's merciful love because of her simplicity and poverty, and thus her song proclaims the new Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of the Good News.

### **4. Mary at the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (Lk 2: 1-20)**

"Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world.

This census -- the first -- took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Behold, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favors.

Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them.

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told."

- Mother Mary: total identification with her Son; two people and one life.
- She lives and experiences lowliness: giving birth in a stable after the unsuccessful search for lodgings.
- Mother Mary beholds the Child God in silence, contemplation, and adoration.
- Mary is witness to the faith of the shepherds and the Magi; she is the one who shows Him to them.

## **5. Mary in Nazareth (Lk 2: 39-40; 51-52)**

"When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favor was with him.

He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with people."

- Life proceeds in family normalcy. Joseph is the male head of the household. Mary is mother and wife, and Jesus is the son who grew up, increasing in wisdom, with the grace of God with Him.

- A perfect community of love exists. Each member is there for the other, with the other, and in the other. The three of them, each with their own character and reality, merge into one love: the will of God.
- Mary begets the Christ, cares for Him and educates Him. Christ begets Mary in the Gospel, cares for her, and teaches her in the Word.
- Christ is the son of Mary, and Mary is a disciple of Christ. Christ becomes man through Mary, and Mary becomes a child of God through and with Christ.
- Mary is the Virgin of the inner self, who relishes with her heart, and understands the manifestation of the love of the God of Covenant.

## 6. Losing, then Finding the Child in the Temple (Lk 2: 41-50)

“Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover.

When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual.

When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it.

They assumed he was somewhere in the party, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances.

When they failed to find him, they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere.

It happened that, three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies.

They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.'

He replied, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'

But they did not understand what he meant.”

- Jesus remains behind and Mary and Joseph seek him with parental anxiety.
- A fast and tender attachment exists between the three.
- Jesus gives them a puzzling answer that they do not understand.
- Mary held these things in her heart.

## 7. The Wedding Feast in Cana: “Do whatever He tells you.”(Jn 2: 1-12)

“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.

And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'

Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.'

They did this; the master tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from -- though the servants who had drawn the water knew -- the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.' This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, but they stayed there only a few days."

- Mary keenly perceives the needs of others.
- She has solidarity with her peers, involving herself in their needs.
- Her love is active and effective: she addresses Jesus, telling Him about a need and asking Him for a solution.
- She believes in her Son's power, and is confident of His response: "Do whatever he tells you."
- Her intercession and influence is rooted in morality.
- Mary's desires, life and mission are manifest: to bring us to identify with Christ.

## **8. At the Cross of Jesus: (Jn 19: 25-27)**

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'Behold your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home."

- She is her Son's companion in the redemption of the world.
- With the Lord, she is spiritually nailed to the Cross, offering herself to the Father along with her Son.
- Mary is the "offering" Virgin, who had given herself completely at the Annunciation. At the cross she gives herself again.
- This is the time of authentic love. She offers the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father.
- Mary remains next to the cross, her mother's heart profoundly hurt, yet she remains erect and strong in the surrender.
- She is the first follower of Christ: she takes the burden of the cross upon herself and carries it with love.

- Her pain becomes fruitful love, as her mother's heart opens itself up to new children. Adopting John, she adopts the Church.

### **9. At the Cenacle: in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 12-14)**

“So from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem, a short distance away, no more than a Sabbath walk; and when they reached the city they went to the upper room where they were staying; there were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Jude son of James.

With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

- Mary is an active presence and the prime fount of prayer and hope in the community.
- Mary is in the midst of the newborn Church. She is present as Jesus' mother, loving Him in these men that He had chosen.
- She loves the first ecclesial community in their concrete reality: she knows their weaknesses and fears.
- Her presence at the Cenacle is an active solidarity with her Son's community.
- She is the one who most forcefully and hopefully pleads for the coming of the Holy Spirit, because her own life had been marked by the intervention of the Spirit.
- In the power of the Spirit, she spreads the Word, and becomes the Mother of the Church, Queen of the Apostles.



## **ATTACHMENT B**

**(for use after the 6th meeting)**

### **Interpersonal Communication**

If we wish to achieve perfect communion, we must learn to teach ourselves to communicate, as in fraternal exchanges. A mature person knows how to listen and engage in a dialogue. Words are the instruments of interpersonal communication. This topic is dedicated to analyzing this important chapter in our education about love: attachments are born and grow through communication, and are cut short when communication ends.

Our society is a paradoxical one. While we are closer to each other than ever, our spiritual distances can seem to be a chasm. Due to our technological advances, communication media have developed almost to perfection, yet today, perhaps like never before, a lack of communication reigns.

The new world that we wish to forge is a world of full spiritual closeness between people – that closeness that conquers physical separation and distance. By this we mean a realm of interpersonal communication, which at times does not even require words, where a look or gesture is enough to understand what the other desires or thinks. It is the world that understands mutual belonging.

Our groups and communities must become a school where we learn to truly and truthfully communicate, and to open ourselves up in order to communicate our words, and to happily receive the enriching words of our brother. We do not wish to master the monologue, to be those people who hoard their own words; nor do we desire to be “tombs,” or experts in sepulchral silence. No, we desire authentic, enriching communication. That is our ideal.

In order to accomplish this, we must foster the following attitudes:

- Knowing how to listen,
- Knowing how to respect,
- Detaching ourselves from antipathy, animosity
- Avoiding pointless discussions,
- Understanding how to adapt.

### **KNOWING HOW TO LISTEN**

This comes first; one who is not willing to listen will never establish communication. If a person intends to always talk about what he is interested in, about what happened to him, about what was said to him, then communication will not flow. How many times has someone just started telling a story when another interrupts with the following:

"How interesting. Once something similar happened to me, blah, blah, blah." While the other was speaking, this person did not listen and thought only of himself.

If, in conversation, we speak of ourselves, it should not be to put ourselves in a starring role, or to eclipse, discourage, or diminish the other. Rather, it should be a sincere discussion about self as a gift in repayment for the gift received from the other.

Listening requires patience. Only those who empty themselves know how to listen, because in them the "me" is not too noisy.

## **KNOWING HOW TO RESPECT**

The success of any dialogue depends on the amount of respect contained therein. It depends on a respect that is willing to accept the other just as he is, with his opinions, points of view and objections; a respect that is delicate and careful not to hurt the other with categorical or ironic statements, or with disqualifying observations.

The Apostle Saint James calls this to our attention in a practical way. He stated:

"Someone who does not trip up in speech has reached perfection and is able to keep the whole body on a tight rein. Once we put a bit in the horse's mouth, to make it do what we want, we have the whole animal under our control Or think of ships: no matter how big they are, even if a gale is driving them, they are directed by a tiny rudder wherever the whim of the helmsman decides. So the tongue is only a tiny part of the body, but its boasts are great. Think how small a flame can set fire to a huge forest The tongue is a flame too. Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole wheel of creation. Wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish of every kind can all be tamed, and have been tamed, by humans; but nobody can tame the tongue -- it is a pest that will not keep still, full of deadly poison. We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse people who are made in God's image: the blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. My brothers, this must be wrong- does any water supply give a flow of fresh water and salt water out of the same pipe? Can a fig tree yield olives, my brothers, or a vine yield figs? No more can sea water yield fresh water." (James 3: 2-12)

Saint Paul also addresses the subject, saying:

"No foul word should ever cross your lips; let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal, ready for the day when we shall be set free. Any bitterness or bad temper or anger or shouting or abuse must be far removed from you -- as must every kind of malice." (Eph 4: 29 - 31)

He repeats this in the Epistle to the Colossians:

"But now you also must give up all these things: human anger, hot temper, malice, abusive language and dirty talk; and do not lie to each other. You have stripped off your old behavior with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator; and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and uncircumcised, or between barbarian and Scythian, slave and free. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything. As the chosen of God, then, the holy

people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful. Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God." (Col 3: 8-16).

Respect requires a careful attempt to understand the "why" contained in the other's reason. If he has a different point of view or opinion from the other, he will not try to convince with violence or intransigence, or attempt to silence or defeat the "adversary."

Therefore he avoids "red light" phrases such as: "Your arguments are entirely wrong, you have no idea what you're talking about," "that has nothing to do with it, "you're out of your mind," or "that's how a child thinks," etc. There are many ways to belittle the other. We may, at times, "win" a discussion, but most often we do not convince the other with our arguments. To the contrary, our combative attitude produces an instinctive reaction that closes the other to any truth we wish to convey, and puts them on the defensive. The other has been hurt, which closes the channel of communication. Whenever one errs by combative discussion, one must learn to recognize one's error, and ask forgiveness in order to re-connect in dialogue.

Knowing how to respect in a discussion also means that we do not pretend to know everything about the other, and to not measure intimacy by the number of private things that are spoken. Everyone has a right to their secrets. After all, there are many things that are only discussed with a Spiritual Director and God. It is not a good thing to reveal intimacies to everyone with the goal of entering into a "personal relationship" with them. Nor is it good to succumb to that morbid curiosity that seeks to dig out what the other has deep within. One must respect, know when to remain silent and wait, to allow full liberty to the other. It is also necessary to receive what is said in confidence by making one's self worthy of it, and not do what so many others do: to repeat what they've heard to others.

A final point about dialog that touches aspects of both listening and respect is our tendency to feel we can mind-read our spouse/friend. We can make huge leaps to erroneous conclusions about the true thoughts and feelings of the other during intense dialog by placing too much confidence in our ability to quickly and accurately perceive the other's views, thoughts, emotions, and especially motivations from only a few words or an expression. Such a tendency leads to discord, shutting down communication and shuttering of true feelings. Growth in capacity for mindful, compassionate dialog can allow mind-reads to be identified, tested for accuracy, and discarded so that peaceful discussion can continue.

## **DETACHING OURSELVES FROM ANTIPATHY**

A conversation is not merely about exchanging “objective” truths. Truths are always perceived from a subjective point of view, and depend on the context of a person’s life experience. It is at times extremely difficult to arrive at an “objective truth.” It is doubly difficult, because the subconscious greatly affects the opinions and points of view of people. This goes for what is said as well as for what is heard. Many times we hear what we want to hear, and not what the other has said. Our inclinations and personal prejudices cause us to hear only part of what has been stated, or even to hear something totally different from what the other has said. There is a saying that “desire is the father of thought.” We understand and hear what we wish to understand and hear, but not the truth of the matter.

In order to communicate and discuss we must learn to “objectify” ourselves. We must detach from our prejudices. If the other “rubs me the wrong way,” I will be predisposed to find something wrong with everything that he says; I will spontaneously reject him from the outset, even in meaningless things.

A conversation is not merely about brandishing arguments – there are people behind those arguments, people with different sensibilities who have perhaps been hurt in the past. That wound, which may appear to have healed, still exists in the subconscious. Perhaps I might superimpose the image of someone I do not like on the one I’m speaking with because of some subconscious connection. We always make psychological projections in our relationships.

To communicate, therefore, is essential to have a deep self-knowledge. We must critically examine the root of our “instinctive” reactions, and examine our prejudices and antipathies that would render our communication unfruitful.

### **AVOID POINTLESS DISCUSSIONS**

There are times when we waste precious time discussing unimportant things: should we meet at 5 or 5:30, should we sing this hymn or that one, should we take a trip to the beach or to the mountains? These are all relative things. The world will not end if we choose one over another. There are so many cases where all that is needed is to express one’s opinion and to let the responsible person make a decision. One must learn to distinguish between the accidental and the truly essential. One must know how to surrender in matters of taste. We should, therefore, not try to “get our own way” in everything. We must expand our tolerance and be magnanimous.

### **VALUING AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE TRUTH OF THE OTHER**

This is closely related to all that we’ve spoken of, particularly respect.

We wish to emphasize the following: for communication to be fruitful, it is necessary to go beyond words. We must try to understand the other, to grasp their intention. To accept the words of someone who speaks with me implies accepting him. Therefore, an honest and true dialogue must be positively predisposed to the other person. If the other person is, for some reason or another, not someone I find to be likable, I must learn to find a way into their person until I find him to be likable, because he is my brother, a child of Mary, someone that the Lord has placed in my path.

In order to communicate fruitfully, as stated above, requires the emptying of the self, and the opening of the self to the **you**. We must receive him and accept him as a person. This leads us to the desire to discover their truth and find enrichment in it. This new truth will complement me, bring new perspectives to me, and help me to clarify my own world view. I will also learn to communicate my own truth according to the viewpoint of the other – in other words, I will adapt to his perspective and his receptivity.

Our personal conversations and exchanges will become, in this way, vehicles of a deep encounter, of true communion. We shall then be able to live the Lord's promise: "For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20). He is not in our midst when we distance ourselves from Him with wounding words, with intransigence, with our silence or chattering; He remains in our midst when we open ourselves to others respectfully, when our words carry a truly fraternal love.

## ATTACHMENT C

### Biblical Texts about Covenant (for use in meeting 12)

#### The “Great Mystery” Hidden for Centuries

The Epistle to the Ephesians speaks of the “**great mystery**” that manifests itself in marriage, the mystery of Christ and the Church. Saint Paul, in his epistles, speaks of this mystery that had remained hidden for centuries, but has now been revealed:

“Through his blood, we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of our sins. Such is the richness of the grace, which he has showered on us in all wisdom and insight. He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ, for him to act upon when the times had run their course: that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth.” (Eph 1: 7-10)

The mystery of Christ had been hidden, but has been revealed to humanity:

“I, who am less than the least of all God's holy people, have been entrusted with this special grace, of proclaiming to the gentiles the unfathomable treasure of Christ and of throwing light on the inner workings of the mystery kept hidden through all the ages in God, the Creator of everything.” (Eph 3: 8-9)

#### Covenant in the Old Testament

The mystery of Christ is rooted in the great mystery revealed by God in the Old Testament. God, Yahweh, is a God of love, rich in mercy, who draws mankind to Himself, and he does this first through his people Israel. He is moved by the plight of his enslaved people, and decides to save them. He brings them out of Egypt, and seals with them a Covenant of Love, by which this people becomes **His** people, His own, and He becomes **their** God.

After the Covenant is sealed in the Sinai by Moses, God progressively reveals his plan of love. However, the people of Israel are unfaithful to the Covenant. God then appears as a jealous God, as a bridegroom whose bride has been unfaithful. Through the prophets, God speaks to the “virgin of Israel,” accusing her of abandoning her bridegroom to follow the Baals, or idols. However, through the same prophets He promises a new Covenant:

“To court, take your mother to court! For she is no longer my wife nor am I her husband. She must either remove her whoring ways from her face and her adulteries from between her breasts, or I shall strip her and expose her naked as the day she was born;

I shall make her as bare as the desert, I shall make her as dry as arid country, and let her die of thirst. And I shall feel no pity for her children since they are the children of her whorings. Yes, their mother has played the whore, she who conceived them has disgraced herself by saying, 'I shall chase after my lovers; they will assure me my keep, my wool, my flax, my oil and my drinks.' This is why I shall block her way with thorns, and wall her in to stop her in her tracks; then if she chases her lovers she will not catch them, if she looks for them she will not find them, and then she will say, 'I shall go back to my first husband, I was better off then than I am now;' she had never realized before that I was the one who was giving her the grain, new wine and oil, giving her more and more silver and gold which they have spent on Baal! This is why I shall take back my grain when it is due and my new wine, when the season for it comes. I shall withdraw my wool and my flax, which were to cover her naked body, and then display her infamy before her lovers' eyes- no one will take her from me then! I shall put an end to all her merrymaking, her festivals, her New Moons and her Sabbaths and all her solemn feasts. I shall make her vines and fig trees derelict of which she used to say, 'These are the pay my lovers gave me.' I shall turn them into a jungle: wild animals will feed on them. I mean to make her pay for the feast-days on which she burnt incense to the Baals, when she tricked herself out in her earrings and necklaces to chase after her lovers, and forget me! -declares Yahweh. But look, I am going to seduce her and lead her into the desert and speak to her heart. There I shall give her back her vineyards, and make the Vale of Achor a gateway of hope. There she will respond as when she was young, as on the day when she came up from Egypt. When that day comes- declares Yahweh- you will call me, 'My husband', no more will you call me, 'My Baal'. I shall banish the names of the Baals from her lips and their name will be mentioned no more. When that day comes I shall make a treaty for them with the wild animals, with the birds of heaven and the creeping things of the earth; I shall break the bow and the sword and warfare, and banish them from the country, and I will let them sleep secure. I shall betroth you to myself forever, I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness. Yes, I shall betroth you to myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh. When that day comes, I shall respond -declares Yahweh- I shall respond to the heavens and they will respond to the earth and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I shall sow her in the country to be mine, I shall take pity on Lo-Ruhamah, I shall tell Lo-Ammi, 'You are my people,' and he will say, 'You are my God.'" (Hosea 2: 4-25.)

Such is the drama of the history of Israel: a God who seeks to unite in covenant with His people, who seals a covenant with this people, who, like a bridegroom, unites in love with his bride who, spurning His love, is unfaithful. In this drama, however, the magnitude of the bridegroom's love is manifested in His mercy and compassion as He promises to seal a new covenant with His people:

"Do not fear, you will not be put to shame again, do not worry, you will not be disgraced again; for you will forget the shame of your youth and no longer remember the dishonor of your widowhood. For your Creator is your husband, Yahweh Sabaoth is his name, the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer, he is called God of the whole world.

Yes, Yahweh has called you back like a forsaken, grief-stricken wife, like the repudiated wife of his youth, says your God. I did forsake you for a brief moment, but in great compassion I shall take you back. In a flood of anger, for a moment I hid my face from you. But in everlasting love I have taken pity on you, says Yahweh, your redeemer.” (Is 54: 4-8)

Yahweh will remember the covenant sealed with His people in the Sinai, and will establish with them an “eternal covenant.”

“ ‘I shall renew my covenant with you; and you will know that I am Yahweh, and so remember and feel ashamed and in your confusion be reduced to silence, when I forgive you for everything you have done,’ declares the Lord Yahweh.” (Ez 16: 59-63)

## The New Covenant

The history of covenant is a spousal history, and in the New Testament God reveals the fullness of the New Covenant by which He, in a previously unimaginable way, will unite with His people in an eternal covenant. This is the great mystery hidden throughout the centuries, but revealed by God in the fullness of time:

“When the completion of the time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons.” (Gal 4 4-5) (See also: Eph 1: 10-11; Heb 9: 26)

This hidden mystery revealed in the fullness of time is the mystery of the Word Made Flesh in the womb of Mary, betrothed to humanity for all time. Christ, the Word Made Flesh, is the Bridegroom Who, by His blood, rescues mankind and seals the New Covenant. Christ the Bridegroom seals the New Covenant with His blood, and founds the new people of Israel: the Church, called to be light to the nations and the beginning of God’s Kingdom on earth.

## Matrimony in the Light of the “Great Mystery” Revealed by God

The Epistle to the Ephesians will relate marriage, as we will see later, to this “great mystery.” However, before citing this passage, we read a text from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which summarizes this mysterious reality:

**796** The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. The Lord referred to himself as the “bridegroom.” The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride “betrothed” to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him (see 1 Cor 6: 15-17; 1Cor 11: 2). The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb (see Rev 22: 17; Eph 1: 4; 5: 27), “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might



sanctify her.”(Eph 5: 26), He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body:(see Eph 5: 29)

It is important to familiarize ourselves with this vision and Biblical perspective. The Covenant of God with His people has been revealed to us in the Old Testament especially in the spousal meaning. Unfortunately, we have not read the prophets often enough, and their terminology tends to be foreign to us. This may even more true when we deal with the New Testament. We may not be familiar with the image of Christ as the Bridegroom with the Church as His bride. Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the Bridegroom, the new Adam, from whose side the Bride emerges, the new Eve. He is the Bridegroom who invites us the wedding, as announced in the Book of Revelation:

“Let us be glad and joyful and give glory to God, because this is the time for the marriage of the Lamb.” (Rev 19: 7)

In full cooperation with His plan, Mary, the Mother of God, therefore becomes no less than the Ark of the New Covenant.

## Attachment D

### Opening Prayer Guidelines For Each Meeting

#### Dear couples of the Family Branch:

During recent years we have sought to place a special emphasis on the prayer that we hold at the beginning of our group meetings. In the first place, we must give thanks, because the great majority of our groups has undertaken the practice of opening or closing meetings with a long and personal prayer. Our groups, besides being formation groups characterized by apostolic zeal and marked with the fraternal seal, are at the same time **prayer groups**. The opening prayer held at the beginning of our meetings are an essential part of the meetings.

Relying on the experience of these recent years, we wish to communicate some observations and concerns that might help to make our opening prayer more personal and fruitful. We also add, in case you do not have it, the prayer guide.

#### I. Some Observations:

1. Do not forget to **create an adequate environment** (light, images, etc.).
2. Carry out prayer so that **it is not interrupted**. For example, begin the meeting with fellowship and food (sandwich, coffee, etc.). That way, the meeting begins at 8:30 and the prayer at 9:00. A group consciousness of the necessity of prayer is paramount, so that everyone arrives before the opening prayer.
3. **The prayer should be directed to the Lord or to the Mother Thrice Admirable; this makes it more personal and intimate.** (we are conversing with them). Therefore, we avoid saying things like “now we’ll sing,” “so and so will read the Gospel,” or “whomever has a petition may present it now,” etc. It is more intimate, and creates a more prayerful environment to say, “Lord, we wish to praise you by singing,” “Lord, open our hearts to your Word,” or “Lord (or dear Mother Thrice Admirable), receive our petitions and thanks,” etc.
4. It is quite easy to move from listening to the Word to personal reflection on the Scripture. **After a few minutes of silent reflection, each group member can express, in a simple and short way, what Word, phrase, or image, touched their heart.** The idea is to arrive at a reception of, and abiding in, the Word, more than a reflection upon It. A full meditation or breaking open of the Word can be held at another time.
5. It is not always necessary to select the Gospel for the coming Sunday. It is perfectly acceptable to choose **a text that seems most adequate** according to the wishes and circumstances of the group.

6. Avoid saying, after each petition, “We pray to the Lord,” or “thanks be to God.” Our prayer becomes richer when, after three people have presented their petitions or thanksgiving, **an antiphon is sung, repeated twice.**

As you can see, the idea is to accentuate the personal character of prayer. We wish to create a moment of real communion with the Lord and with the Mother Thrice Admirable, in a calm environment of intimacy and depth. Such is the goal of these latter observations.

## II. Guide For Group Prayer:

We feel that our group prayer should **last 20 minutes or more.** The meeting should begin with spirituality, with a time of calm communion with our Lord and with Mary.

This guide is offered to bring this spirituality about. This is not a “type of prayer,” but rather a thread, or a **channel**, to a peaceful and personal prayer, not merely “rote” or “formal.” The group may certainly adopt their own prayerful rites that flow from their own lives that personalize the prayer even further.

**The host family should prepare the environment prior to the start of the meeting,** so that prayer is carried out more effortlessly: they should assure that there is an image of the Mother Thrice Admirable, a Unity Cross, a lit candle, and flowers. Indirect light is preferred to create a more intimate and cozy setting.

**Prayer is carried out with all members seated.** Previously, **a prayer leader has been designated** to lead the prayer. This is the person who invites members into the prayer, and who guides the group through the steps of the prayer. Since antiphons will be blended into the prayer (this will be explained later), it is recommended to sing them previously to rehearse them. **The prayer leader will prepare copies of the hymns, antiphons, and Gospel Reading that will be sung and read.**

1. **Open with a hymn (perhaps to the Holy Spirit).**
2. **Prayer**

The prayer leader prays an opening prayer. This should be a simple prayer. Generally, throughout the prayer session, we should try to speak in a personal and spontaneous manner, avoiding the use of florid and overly formal language. If our language is imperfect... it doesn't matter. Our Lord asks us to be as children before our Father when we pray. What follows is **merely an example** of a possible opening prayer (done freely, simply, and spontaneously):

Dear Mother Thrice Admirable, we gather together next to you and your Son, Jesus, to begin our prayer. Pray for us to the Holy Spirit, that He show us to pray with simplicity and depth. We bring to you everything we are and everything we have, our desires of the day, our children, our marriages. We wish to abide in you and in our Lord, to renew our faith and our love. Mary,

be with us and show us how to speak with you and with your Son, Jesus.  
Amen.

3. **Read, slowly, a Gospel passage**, preferably for the following Sunday. (another passage, pertaining to the group's circumstances or needs could certainly be used). Before Reading, ask each member to listen for **a word, phrase, or image** that grabs their attention, and touches their heart. The passage should be read **twice**, slowly, so as to better listen for God's Word.
4. **Remain in silence for at least two minutes to allow each member to reflect on what they have heard.**
5. **Each member then shares the Word, phrase, or image that came to them, and briefly adds what they think the Lord is saying to them in the Scripture.**

It is important to clarify, especially when first doing this as a group, that **this is not about initiating a group reflection** on the Scripture, nor to explore the difficulties of the passage. This is done at other times. The importance of this type of prayer is to discover how the Lord speaks to each of us in a personal way through a word, phrase, or image. It is important to keep this in mind; otherwise, we could lose the prayerful atmosphere that we seek. Scripture studies and meditation can be done at other times. Next, the prayer leader calls for a hymn.

#### 6. **Hymn**

A hymn is sung to the Lord or to Mary. If the group has no members who can play an instrument or lead the song, there is no need to worry. Simply sing a song known to all.

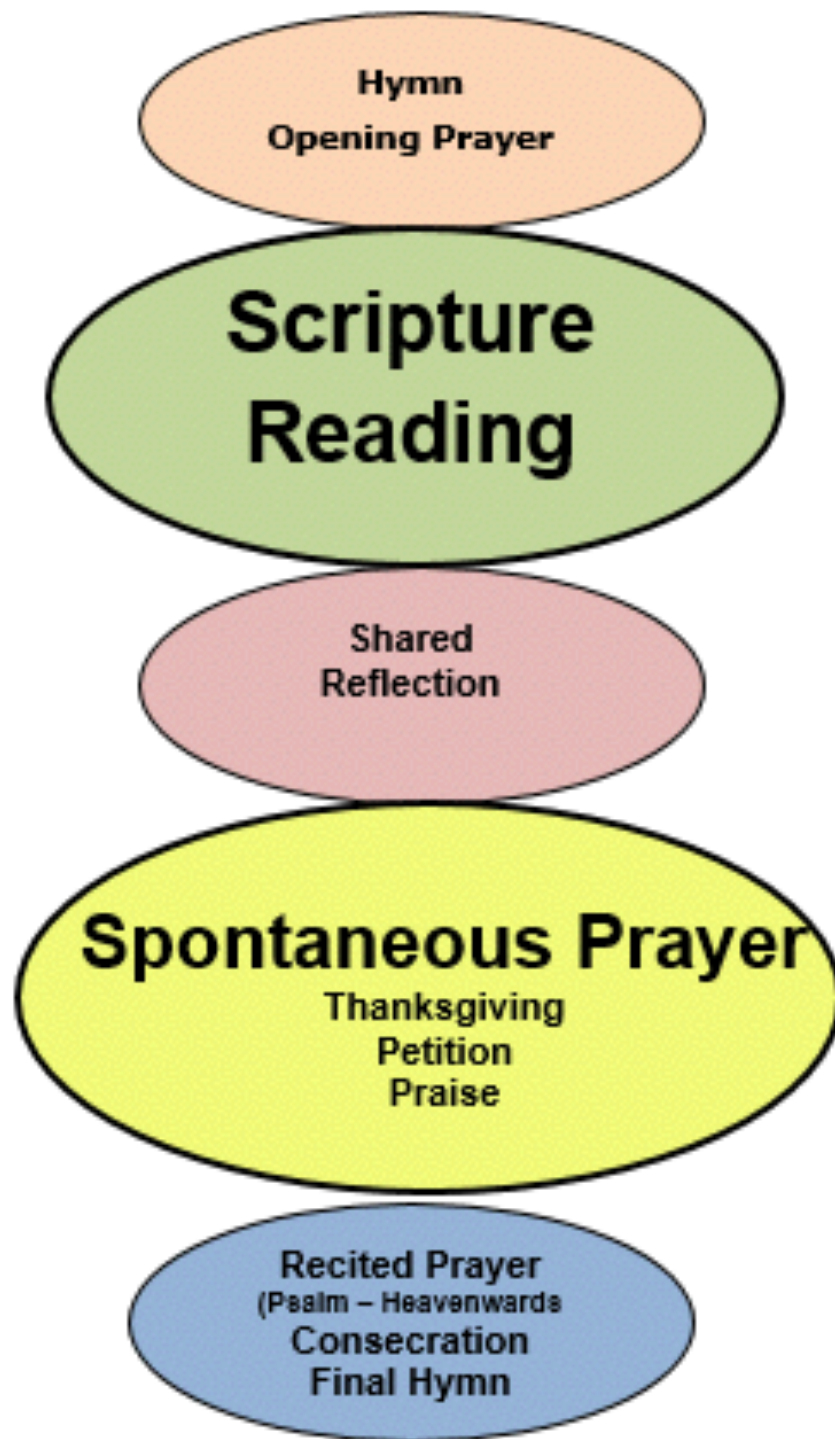
7. **Next spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving, petition, or praise are offered, according to the desires of group members. The antiphon is sung twice after each third person has prayed.**

8. This is a **personal prayer**, from the heart, in which intentions should not be general or broad, that do not touch the personal situation of the people praying. To create a certain rhythm, antiphons are sung after every third person has prayed. Possible examples are "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," "Lord, send down your Spirit, and renew the face of the Earth," or other similar ones, well known to all. Before the prayer, the prayer leader asks the group **not to repeat the usual group prayer responses** such as "Lord, hear our prayer, etc., explaining that the antiphon will be sung instead after every third prayer. Either the leader, or someone from the group, will introduce the antiphon. After all prayers are presented, the prayer leader will guide the group to read the selected group prayer or psalm.

#### 9. **The group prays a Psalm or a prayer from Heavenwards.**

It is recommended that each measure of verses be read alternately by the men and women of the group. The prayer leader should provide copies at the beginning of the meeting.

10. In conclusion, the Consecration Prayer My Queen, my Mother, is prayed as a group, and a hymn is sung.



## APPENDIX 1

### Text Selection A

#### Citations about Spousal Covenant in Church Documents

##### 1. From Sacred Scripture:

**Genesis 1: 26-28:** “God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.'

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God created he them. Male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth.'”

**Ephesians 5: 28-31:** “So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

**Matthew 19: 6:** “They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.”

##### 2. The Second Vatican Council defines the mystery of the Marital Covenant:

“Established by the Creator, and subject to its own laws, the intimate conjugal community of life and love is founded on the **marital covenant**; in other words, on personal and irrevocable consent. From this human act, by which spouses give themselves and receive each other mutually, is born, in society, an institution that is confirmed by divine law.” (**Gaudium et Spes**)

The Council here presents the nucleus of what a marriage is: an intimate conjugal community of life and love, which, by mutual consent, is the giving of one to the other and is irrevocable, establishing a Covenant of Love.

“They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.” (Mt 19: 6) With the intimate union of their persons and activities that uphold each other, couples become conscious of their unity, and they make it increasingly so... As our God of old established unity with his people by means of a Covenant of Love and Faithfulness, so now the Savior of Mankind and Bridegroom of the Church unites with Christian spouses by means of the Sacrament of Matrimony.” (GS V: 48).

### **3. The Code of Canon Law refers to the Sacrament of Matrimony:**

“The matrimonial covenant, by which the man and woman constitute a consortium for all life, ordained by its natural inclination to the good of the spouses and the generation and raising of children, has been elevated by Christ the Lord to the dignity of Sacrament among the baptized.

Matrimonial consent is the act of the will by which man and woman give themselves and mutually accept each other in an irrevocable covenant to constitute marriage.”

(CICA IV Santi: 1055-1057)

Marriage is hereby not referred to as a contract, but as a covenant. This Word places marriage in the context of the Biblical Covenant, referring to the Salvation Covenant that Yahweh establishes with his people Israel, that Jesus Christ seals with his blood.

### **4. John Paul II’s Encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* states:**

#### **Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, and the Sacrament of Matrimony.**

13. The communion between God and mankind finds its definitive fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the Bridegroom Who Loves, and who gives Himself as Savior of humanity, uniting it to himself as His Body.

He reveals the original truth of matrimony, the truth of the “principle” (27), and, freeing men from the hardness of their hearts, he enables them to fully live it.

This revelation achieves its definitive fullness in the gift of love that the Word of God bestows on humanity by assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the cross for His bride. This sacrifice entirely unveils (28) the marriage of the baptized that becomes the true symbol of the new and eternal Covenant, validated by the blood of Christ. The Spirit that the Lord pours into us renews our hearts, and enables the man and woman to love each other as Christ loved



us. In this way, conjugal love achieves the fullness for which it was inwardly ordained: conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific mode of participation for the married couple, in which they are called to live the same charity that Christ gave on the cross.

In a deservedly famous essay, Tertulian has appropriately expressed the grandeur and beauty of the conjugal life in Christ: "How can I ever express the happiness of the marriage that is joined together by the Church strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father? ...How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow-servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit." (29)

The Church, faithfully receiving and reflecting upon the Word of God, has solemnly taught and teaches that the matrimony of the baptized is one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant. (30)

In effect, through baptism, the man and woman are infused into the New and Eternal Covenant, into the spousal Covenant of Christ with the Church. And due to this indestructible infusion, the intimate communion of life and conjugal love, founded by the Creator,(31) is elevated and assumed in the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power.

By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, couples remain attached one to the other in the most profoundly indissoluble way. Their reciprocal belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship of Christ with the Church.

Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder for the Church of what happened on the cross; they are, for each other and for their children, witness to salvation, of which the sacrament makes them participants. By this event of salvation, matrimony, as every Sacrament, is memorial, actualization and prophecy; "as memorial, the sacrament confers the grace and duty of recalling the great Works of God, and to give testimony about them to their children; as actualization it confers the grace and duty of adopting as their immediate endeavor for each other and for their children, the demands of a forgiving and redeeming love; as prophecy it confers the grace and duty of living and giving testimony to the hope of our future encounter with Christ." (32)

## **5. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states the following:**

**1642** Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,"<sup>150</sup> and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb.

**1641** "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God."<sup>147</sup> This grace proper to the sacrament of

Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."<sup>148</sup>

**1647** The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning.

**1648** It can This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God's faithful love. Spouses who with God's grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.

## **Text B**

### **Fr. Kentenich's Words Regarding Spousal Covenant**

Matrimony is the deepest and most enduring life community possible. Above all else, it is a community of love.

Christ's love for His Church is the model of matrimonial love. What is the Pauline conception of conjugal love? For St. Paul, it is evident that conjugal love is the foundation of the marital attachment. Therefore, he tells us that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves His Church.

Christ's love for His Church should be the norm for spouses. What is Christ's love for his Church like? The Lord gave his life, his blood for the Church, His wife. Therefore, you and I must do the same for ours. I should not arrive home merely to rest for a bit, enjoy my wife, and then go to entertain myself with my favorite pastimes. I must give my life for my spouse, meaning that I must give her my time, show interest in her problems and worries. It is clear that St. Paul's thinks of conjugal love as existing on a higher plain.

What does St. Paul think about women? As a wife, how must I love my husband? I must serve him as the Church serves Christ, cultivating communion between spouses. Wives must offer a servile and self-denying love to their husbands.

Conjugal love is a form of loving your neighbor. If we wish to know, in depth, how spouses should love each other according to the Pauline model, we must dig deeper into the apostle's idea. The Lord tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God and one another. Precisely put, the love for one another springs from the love of God. We must love our wife, love her with our heart, and be willing to sacrifice for her. That love emanates from God's love. We must therefore feed the love of God in ourselves, continuously. My love for my wife will grow to the degree that my love for God grows. If I stop feeding my love for God,

the day will come when my relationship with my spouse becomes cold and distant.

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## APPENDIX 2

### Excerpts from Fr. Kentenich regarding our relationship with God as spouses.

#### **ABIDING: In God the Father, in Christ, in Mary, in the supernatural world**

The following excerpts of Fr. Kentenich seek to aid us in our reflections on the the degree of warmth, closeness and deep-rootedness that we may find in God's heart, our definitive home.

“Do you know that warm and familiar place that eternal love has prepared: where hearts beat in intimacy and are overcome with joyful sacrifice; where abiding **one in another, they burn and flow towards the heart of God**; where fountains of love impetuously well up to sate the thirst for love that ails the world? (Heavenwards, p. 196).

“People of our times lack security in life. These days everything is mixed up and confused like leaves in a storm. In the middle of a situation of such characteristics, man feels desolate. Yes, how great are the dangers of his life in every scope of life!... **Well then, the Lord tells us that the paternal care of the Father of Heaven is so ineffable that His children feel sheltered and secure in all of life's circumstances** ... Our fundamental attitude must be, therefore, to infinitely trust in God the Father. We are people endowed with reason, and we therefore must be **occupied** by things, but not be **preoccupied** with them. We must not be overcome by anxiety. It is worth saying, we must not allow our legs to tremble, thinking day and night, ‘What will we do... what will we do... what will we do?’ We have no place for anxiety!”

“How lovely it is to be authentic Catholics, to believe that the God of Heaven loves me madly!”

“It is a mistake to think that the love for Mary would separate me from Christ. When I say Christ, I say Father; when I say Mary, I say Christ. Love for Mary does not impede the cultivation of love for Christ.” May the new man emerge. “Modern man lacks the simple, supernatural and believing vision – that simple and practical faith in Divine Providence which dares to leap to the supernatural world in all of life's circumstances. Man lacks the **master key** that unlocks any problems, not in a scientific sense, but in the **practical domain** of his life journey. May the new man emerge.

“In my life do I truly consider myself a child of God the Father?... Throughout all the situations of our lives, He desires to **take us into His heart**. What must I then do? ...for

my part, I must **return to Him...** Well then, to where do we return? When I face difficulties, where must I ultimately go? I could resort to other people, true, but in the end they all **should lead me to God the Father.**

What does it mean to go heavenwards? To offer Him our hearts anew, to experience complete dependency on Him..."

"Concluding this conference, I believe that I must remind you of what we, children of Schoenstatt, expect in a special way of our Shrine: not only that the Blessed Mother unite us more deeply to Christ, but that she also, in Christ, lead us to the Father. At the hour of His crucifixion, the Lord told St. John: 'Behold your mother.' In reality, this was equivalent to saying 'this is your mother, who has the responsibility of your finally finding a **home in the heart of the Father.**'" (On Monday Evenings)

..."In Heavenwards (Fr. K.'s prayer book) are found very simple verses. In these verses we tell God the Father: Is it the eagle, who on his vigorous wings/ takes towards the sun/ his weak chicks? Do you understand what I am trying to say? Who is it who snatches our hearts to himself? It is God the Father, who has created our hearts for Himself.

We now ask the great question: What is the importance in our Family of love, the love of God, filial love for the Father and for the Blessed Mary, love for the Eternal, love for our neighbor? I need only remind you of the foundation of our Family, the life-giving force of our family and the aim of our family is the serious living of our Covenant of Love in all its aspects." (On Monday Evenings, p14)

**ABIDE** as spouses, one in the other, with the other, and for the other...

So much uprooting can exist in marriage! So many dangers may exist in the family to our inner self, to our moral and religious life! We have already suffered so many disappointments in relationship with others! Please make an examination of conscience and recall the crises and concrete difficulties of your family and marriage..... What is the remedy that St. John proposes? That whoever has a lively faith in Christ and his teachings will overcome all difficulties. I repeat, a burning faith life will help us to overcome all." (On Monday Evenings, Fr.K.)

**"Marital love awakens the instinctive longing to make the other happy.** Normally, this motivation is characteristic of marital love. I wish to make my spouse happy, above all others. That he or she be happy, through me. **I want to make him or her happy."**

"When one is always next to the other, and experience the failings of each other, it is difficult to maintain respect for each other. What a sacrifice and art it is for spouses to keep quiet about the spouse's failings in front of others!

Whenever I must assert my rights, do I do it agitatedly or with respect? When the time comes to call the other's attention to certain faults, how do we do it? By yelling? Or by

trying to tactfully and respectfully understand the other's weakness, striving to overcome them patiently? I believe we understand each other..." (On Monday Evenings, Fr.K.)

"We must also do something, something forceful. And what is it? We must instruct ourselves, and bring the offering of self-instruction to the Blessed Mother. She will then say: 'Well done, I will now assume the responsibility. I shall now grab the bull by the horns, and will take on the task of having something good come of you, that you may become a small saint, a small mother, a small or great parent of a holy family...' As a husband, I should tell Mary: 'Mater, take my wife in your hands. You must help her to learn, because of her inner riches. She could be a saint, but there are many things to polish first. I cannot do it alone, you must do it. I make a Covenant with you: I shall also strenuously work on myself, but you must then teach my wife.'... The Blessed Mother says: "Here I am. I wish to polish your husband and make of him a small saint." (The Family at the Service of Life, Fr.K. p.200)

"The heart of man is being attacked by the same ailment of atrophy... it is simply a knot of desires. Wherever there is heartache, personal desire has not matured. **Heartaches are not deep, permanent or warm, and they change quickly.** Therefore, reason and will cannot clarify or regulate, in a healthier way, the movements of desire, and, on the other hand, desire does not manage to grasp neither reason nor will. The heart cannot ascend to God."

"I must love my neighbor as myself. As a husband **I must love my wife as if I myself was in her place. And so also the wife must love her husband as she loves herself.**... How am I to love my neighbor as I will love my wife, or how the wife loves the husband? I must see the light of Christ in him. Therefore, I will love the Christ in him. Please do not forget that we, as Christians, are in a way 'other Christs.' Hence, we must love Christ in our neighbor."

**SHELTERING:** our children; others; friends; parents, colleagues, etc.

Wherever the father, mother, siblings are, that is where the home is. **The Catholic religion is a religion of home.** "It must be lived and practiced first in the natural plain. It is not enough to know that as Christians we are brothers. We must strive to create a new generation of fathers and mothers, ideal wives and mothers, ideal fathers for the renewal of the family.

The lack of home of today's man stems from the scarcity of **home life.** **The lack of home is the core of the problems of today's culture; the creation of home life is the great task that we must undertake in all its ramifications.** Finding a home by abiding directly in God does not solve the problem. **We must prepare a home for mankind in an earthly place.** This is how the supernatural experience of home will heal, and hearts will be captivated. **That which does not reach the heart is never secure.** It would not offer sufficient shelter and stability. Is it not clear in what direction we should pedagogically head? We are interested in two things: **the creation of the natural home and the supernatural home...**

"The Christ in me must be given the opportunity to love the Christ in others."

“To love **in community**. We must state, it is not only for the husband and wife to love each other, but **we must love, along with our children, each other**. All members of the family must form a circle, a circuit of love.

...And it is from her Shrine that she takes on the task of educating us. My contribution to this gestation lies in creating new foundations

My children must seriously strive to succeed in life. But if I have been an authentic father for them, and have cared for them at all times, even in the midst of the struggle that they must fight, they will always quietly feel that their father is always with them, infusing **security and sheltering** into them.” (On Monday Evenings, Fr. K.)

“Fathers and mothers! Guide your children to a profound surrender to the Blessed Mother, because, if not, you deprive them of a point of contact for religious living that, from the human and psychological viewpoint, cannot be replaced with anything. Because, without even a seed for the development of the Marian point of view, we are practically forsaken.” May the new man emerge. Fr. K.