

PROGRAM FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF BASIC FORMATION



YEAR OF INTRODUCTION

**Family Branch
SCHOENSTATT APOSTOLIC MOVEMENT
2014**

INDEX

		Page
GUIDELINES FOR USE OF THIS MATERIAL (2014)		5
Meeting 1	The Schoenstatt Group: a Community	6
Meeting 2	The Schoenstatt Group: a Prayer Community	7
Meeting 3	Schoenstatt: a Charismatic Movement for the Church	8
Meeting 4	Schoenstatt: a Marian Movement	11
Meeting 5	Our Founder, Fr. Joseph Kentenich	14
Meeting 6	The Schoenstatt Shrine	18
Meeting 7	Sacrament of Matrimony: Gift and Task	21
Meeting 8	New Family: United in Love, of Wholesome Attachments, Rooted in the Faith, and Missionary	25
Meeting 9	A Family of Wholesome Attachments (Relationships)	30
Meeting 10	Family Rooted in Faith	32
Meeting 11	A Missionary Family	34

Meeting 12	Family Traditions and Costums	37
------------	-------------------------------	----

ATTACHMENTS	
A GUIDE TO GROUP PRAYER (FOR OPENING EACH MEETING)	41
PRAYERS	44
GROUP DYNAMICS	47
GROUP DYNAMICS: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER	48
GROUP DYNAMICS: LABELING CARDS	49
GROUP DYNAMICS: WORLD EVENTS AND THEIR IMPACT	51
GROUP DYNAMICS: THE EPITAPH	53
GROUP DYNAMICS: MAKE YOUR OWN BAG	55
GROUP DYNAMICS: ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS	57
IMAGES OF THE MARY IN THE BIBLE	59

NOTES:

GUIDELINES FOR USE OF THIS MATERIAL (2014)

- These meetings present a basic view of the TOPICs that will be more deeply internalized over time.
- The meetings are designed so that the leaders can use the materials according to each group's rhythm and pace. That is, the sequence may be altered according to the group characteristics.
- Each meeting covers:

Meeting Objective
 Opening Prayer
 Review the Purpose
 Conversation Starter
 Content
 Discussion
 Suggested Commitments
 Final Prayer

- The Conversation Starter is **merely a suggestion** for introducing the TOPIC. Each group leaders may seek an original and creative form, different from the suggested one. What matters is that it opens the group to the content to be covered.
- The same goes for the Commitment work. Based on the group discussions, leaders can help the couples to begin applying what they are getting from the meeting content to their own lives.
- It is suggested that, to observe significant dates, the meeting be used to encourage participation in the commemoration: For example:
 - October 18: Covenant of Love, the Foundation of Schoenstatt
 - May: Mary's Month
 - December: Advent/Celebration of the Nativity
- **Suggested basic bibliography for preparation of content:**

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, Can also be found in www.vatican.va)

Encyclical: *Familiaris Consortio* (Can also be found in www.vatican.va)

On Monday Evenings. Volume 20. Fr. Kentenich

200 Questions about Schoenstatt, Fr. Jonathan Niehaus.

Family at the Service of Life, Recollection Days for couples, Fr. Kentenich

The Marian Person, Fr. Joseph Kentenich

New Vision and Life, The founding of Schoenstatt, Fr. Jonathan Niehaus.

Mission and Message, Schoenstatt

Foundations of Education in the Home, Fr. Joseph Kentenich.

Videos (may be used as Conversation Starters or as instructional material for leaders):

About Schoenstatt by Archbishop Dolan of New York: http://youtu.be/GiWbTlp__xw

EWTN, Schoenstatt Presentation, Fr. Gerold Langsch: <http://youtu.be/KZhlMhgWu4Y>

What is Schoenstatt? Fr. Gerold Langsch: <http://youtu.be/PrLzyAZDx5U>

BEGINNING OF THE FIRST YEAR MEETING PROGRAM

Meeting 1

TOPIC: The Schoenstatt Group: a Community

Objectives:

- Initiate group work, starting with member introductions;
- Introduce what a Schoenstatt group essentially is (how it works, what is done in meetings, etc.)
- Make plans for meetings (date, place); include the Journey of CB1, intergroup meetings, Branch trips, etc. in the timeline.

1. Opening Prayer

2. Suggested Conversation Starter:

- Introduction of the leaders and of the couples, using family photos that have been previously requested.
- Couples work: (Plan 10 minutes for each couple to work independently before sharing aloud)
 - A. Choose 6 words that represent or identify us as a couple and/or family.
 - B. Symbolize the discussion into a drawing that will allow us to recall it in the future.

3. Discussion

4. Commitment

5. Final Prayer

Note: 5 possible group dynamics are attached (see Attachments)

Meeting 2

TOPIC: The Schoenstatt Group: a Prayer Community

Objectives:

- Underscore the importance of prayer in general, and in the group meetings
- Hold a well prepared prayer session that contains the elements normally found in our group prayers (see A Guide to Group Prayer)
- Introduce the image of the Mother Thrice Admirable (MTA) of Schoenstatt. Explain that the image of the Blessed Mother, received at the beginning, will accompany the group. Invite a couple to take it home until the next meeting and thus the image will begin a pilgrimage among the group.

1. Opening Prayer

2. Review Previous Commitment

3. Suggested Conversation Starter:

Share religious experiences or lifestyles that have impacted them. What does prayer mean to each, what is their favorite prayer? What are some obstacles to a good prayer life?

4. Discussion

5. Suggested Commitment: Visit an Adoration Chapel at your parish or any catholic shrine.

6. Final Prayer

Meeting 3

TOPIC: SCHOENSTATT: A CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT FOR THE CHURCH

OBJECTIVE:

Show that Schoenstatt is a Work of God with a charism for the Church and for present times.

1. Opening Prayer

2. Review Previous Commitment

3. Suggested Conversation Starters (options):

- ◆ **Share images of shrines**, of the Blessed Mother, of Father Joseph Kentenich, words (group community, family, love, Schoenstatt, etc.), and share how these images or words speak to us.
- ◆ Post **2 paper charts**, one with the word *marriage*, and the other with *family*. Ask what difficulties are found today in marriages and families, and write them on the charts.
- ◆ **Personal testimony**; could be from a family or couple of the branch, sharing the impact that Schoenstatt has had for their lives.

4. Content:

Schoenstatt is an Apostolic Movement in the Church, which aims to help the religious and moral renewal of present day society. ***This renewal begins with the family.*** Why the family? The family is the basic unit of society. Wholesome, renewed families are necessary for a wholesome and renewed society. "The family is the cornerstone that the Church needs today": His Holiness John Paul II.

Now, let us read and reflect the following text that expresses the richness of the marriage as a vocation. Then, we discuss the questions suggested below.

Marriage is a vocation

The most beautiful pages of the Bible are those which speak of the different calls from God (Exodus 3, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, among others). "I have called you by your name." He tells Isaiah. Likewise it was God who awakened love between the spouses. It was Jesus Christ

who also said to his apostles “Come and follow Me.” In the same manner, spouses were called to follow Him. The difference was that they were called by two.

Every call implies that God is the one who **chooses and assigns a determined task** in benefit of others. God has called them to be an image of the Love of Christ for mankind.....to be the channel by which that love goes to the spouse, to the children, and to the entire world. From all eternity, He thought of them united (JR 1, 5). As members of a parish, of a Movement, this election and our apostolic vocation become ever more clear. He needs us in order to save families and to collaborate in the building of the Kingdom of God.

Every call is **free**, by no merits of its own. God chooses the small for great tasks. In this way also, we are aware of our smallness and our limitations so that our spousal love is a reflection of the love Christ has for His Church.

We also see our limitations in the task of educating and leading, as priests, our children to God. “Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned” (MT 11, 25).

In every call, there is a **personal encounter** with Him who calls (JN 1, 35-51). Perhaps at the moment of our marriage we did not know of this call nor did we know Him who was calling us. We only saw the spouse. “Come and see” (JN 1, 39). Perhaps with the passing of time we have discovered Christ more deeply or we sense the greatness of the love of God in our lives.

For every call there is a **response** without losing time... (MT 21, 22), there are no more excuses; suddenly it does not coincide with our plans (MT 19, 16-26 the rich young man). Every call implies a radical and unconditional response.

Where the call is, the grace is also there. Every call brings with it a **promise**. The condition for fulfilling the promise is fidelity in trials and difficulties. We listen to the angel at the Annunciation: “Do not fear, Mary, for you have found favor with God...” What happens is that often we do not trust and we do not seek the sacramental grace of our marriage.

Marriage is a call **to sanctity as a couple**. “Come and follow Me.” In her thinking, the Church has still not changed her concept of married life as a way to sanctity. Father Kentenich, the Founder of the Schoenstatt Movement, strives against this mentality and invites us to develop a lay spirituality on the way to sanctity where married life, sexuality, work, and education of the children have a particular place. Marriage is a “**superior school of love**” and there should be a holy competition between those consecrated and those married... to see who arrives first to sanctity and to the fullness of love. Everything in marriage can be a way to sanctity.

On the other hand, all human love will sooner or later disillusion us and becomes a **diving board** which leads us to find a deeper shelter in God. For that, God places difficulties in our marriage... to educate us in love. There is much which has to be polished and much to which we must become unattached.

5. Discussion

1. What does this text say to me?

2. Did I ever think of sanctity for two?
3. What is the value and the meaning of disillusion?

6. Suggested Commitment:

Each couple writes their goals of marriage and family that they dreamed of at their marriage. The question is: What was our dream when we married? What did we wish to build together?

In the next meeting, couples will share what this exercise meant to them.

7. Closing Prayer

MEETING 4

TOPIC: SCHOENSTATT A MARIAN MOVEMENT

OBJECTIVES:

- Share the Marian experiences of every group member.
- Introduce the original style of Schoenstatt piety.

1) Opening Prayer:

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starters (options):

Prepare a discussion to recall the Marian experience of each group member.

Suggestion A:

- Give a holy card of the Blessed Mother to each person, and invite them to write three words that answer the question:

What place does the Blessed Mother have in my life today?

- Discussion.

Suggestion B:

- Prepare pictures of scenes of the Blessed Mother in the New Testament.
- Write the corresponding verses on the back.
- Group members choose one they identify with and explain why.

4) Content:

After each member shares their answers, the leaders explain that Schoenstatt's particularly Marian charism is also the fruit of personal experience, the experience of our Founder, Fr. Joseph Kentenich, and therefore is not something that he primarily developed with a special intention. Rather, it is a gift from God, as likewise, through the history of the Church, every movement founder also received his or her personal charism as both, a freely given grace and as a task: to place it at the disposition of all humanity

Our charism is not an invention, but is founded in the long history of the Church and her teachings, and even more so in the plan of redemption, that chose that Jesus be born of a mother, and that she be His **permanent companion and**

collaborator in the entire work of Redemption. (Cite Scriptures, Holy Fathers, Encyclicals, etc.)

God had our Founder experience the entire **educational** power of the Blessed Mother, in his own life, and in the lives of those entrusted to him, so that he could convincingly proclaim this message as a path to renewal and healing of the multiple wounds of humanity, and of the world in which we live.

In Schoenstatt's case, this is not "old school" Marian piety of offerings, or of prayers by memorization, but rather an original piety, characterized by 3 **A's**:

- It is an **active** piety. It is the "nothing without you, nothing without us" alluded to in our Covenant of Love – as we call it –that each person makes with the Blessed Mother, and which represents our original path, because it requires our human cooperation, which is further established as a condition. It is the 1%, that each must give, it is the loaf that the Lord requires in order to perform the miracle of multiplication of the loaves. We call this cooperation "Capital of Grace." In other words, we all give what we have, our efforts, sacrifices, prayers, to this communal account of graces, and we all have the right to draw on this *communal account of graces*.
- It is **associated** with a place, the Schoenstatt Shrine, where we are given special graces with which the Blessed Mother supports our efforts to renew ourselves, as couples and as families, in our faith.
- It is not merely an active piety, but also **affective and effective** at the same time, because we are invited to engage our hearts in this process of renewal of faith and of married and family life. We place ourselves with our *hearts* disposed, under the teaching wisdom of the Blessed Mother, so that she is revealed as *Queen* in our personal, family, work, economic, etc., struggles. But also so that, upon giving her our heart, she can form us as consistent Christians: coherent, whole, not only in the spiritual realm, *but from within, from the most intimate center of our personality and which is thus expressed in every facet of our existence*. Our founder once explained, "If we give God only our intelligence and will, but give our heart and affection to the world, we can easily guess as to who finally decides the battles of daily living."

With the fervent and whole surrender of our person, that is, of our whole self to Mary as our *Mother and Educator*, through the Covenant of Love, we show a path that helps to form sound Christians, with whose testimony help to renew the environment in which they live, beginning with their marriages and families, but spanning all of society.

So, our Founder not only saw the Blessed Mother as the prime model in all circumstances - as the first and most faithful apostle of Christ, as Companion and Collaborator in His work - but also as the *Mother and Educator* of a whole, sound and consistent faith. Whoever learns to love her and to trust her can be confident

of being protected in all of life's battles, will be transformed into a true apostle, and will be transported without delay to the heart of God.

4) Discussion:

Leaders will summarize the discussion and clear any doubts.

5) Suggested Commitment:

During the Closing Prayer, prayer cards of the Mother Thrice Admirable with the consecration prayer can be distributed, and the suggestion made that the couples pray it daily.

6) Closing Prayer

Meeting 5

TOPIC: OUR FOUNDER, FR. JOSEPH KENTENICH

OBJECTIVE:

To learn about the essential characteristics of Fr. Kentenich as Founder of Schoenstatt with an original charism.

1) Opening Prayer:

(Suggestion: include a prayer from *Heavenwards*)

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starter:

- Using a video introduce the life of the Founder showing that Fr. Kentenich is the instrument, elected by God, to give the Church a new charism.
- Discuss:
 1. What impresses me most about the life of the Founder?
 2. Which of his spiritual characteristics strike me as a response to the struggles of today's life?

4) Content:

Who is Fr. Joseph Kentenich?

a. Founder:



He is one of the many founders who, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, founded new communities in the heart of the Church in order to provide certain services to the same Church. Fr. Kentenich founded the Schoenstatt Apostolic Movement, otherwise officially known as the Schoenstatt Work.

Fr. Kentenich's foundation includes communities of priests and laity, communities that live an evangelical life, and communities that more closely resemble the "ecclesiastical movements" that have existed up to now.

Fr. Kentenich's movement appears as a complex expression of multiple communities of a kind rarely seen in similar form in the life of the Church, with the exception of the Church itself. This is food for thought, and signals something of importance. Fr. Kentenich did not want, by his work, to found anything but a "Little Church".

Obviously, a foundation of this kind could not be built in a day. The communities of Schoenstatt originated in a unique occurrence, a **COVENANT OF LOVE** with the Blessed Mother at the Schoenstatt Shrine, on October 18, 1914. The fulfillment of this movement's work would consume Fr. Kentenich's entire priestly life.

This founding work not only consumed all of Fr. Kentenich's life, but also all of his energy. All of the Church's founders have known that, according to God's wishes, their work could only survive and prosper if they were themselves willing, at all moments, to give of their original being as an offering. Fr. Kentenich knew no other way to live. Two stages of his life were especially characterized by self-sacrifice to Schoenstatt's foundation: in the years 1941-1945, when, while his Work was persecuted, he was imprisoned by the Nazi regime in a concentration camp, and later, the fourteen years from 1951 to 1965 that he spent in exile.

b. Prophet for his time:

Fr. Kentenich was a man who quickly, before World War I, and clearly perceived the deep and total historical change that we were living, in these transitional times. In the Founding Document of the Schoenstatt Movement on October 18, 1914, we read a short, but eloquent observation: "A new era approaches with giant steps."

Fr. Kentenich did not merely settle for analyzing the signs of his times. The changing times urged him into action, to deeply recognize, in the times and events, the voice of God that called him to collaboration. For Fr. Kentenich, God was fundamentally "the God of life". To him this meant that God was not simply the Living God and Fount of all Life, but also that He is attached to all the life that He created, intimately present in this life and effectively active, so that God can be found in all things, and His will is represented in all Creation: in all things, in all events, in all moments of life, and not least, in all people and all human relations.

c. Man of the Church:

He was a "Man of the Church" because he was a priest. Since receiving his priestly ordination on July 8, 1910, Fr. Kentenich accepted his lifelong priesthood with an irrevocable radicalism, as a total surrender to the service of Christ, and, consequently, to the service of the Church. He gave his entire life to the Church, his great love. And so he gave the most value in his life and priestly duties to do not his own will or work, but the will and work of God, which also meant to do the work of the Church.

But in his case, the characterization as "man of the Church" acquired a particular and deeper meaning. Fr. Kentenich could not simply live at the service of the Church; he had to live a special mission in the Church entrusted to him by God. This mission consisted in the foundation of his

communities. He was able to inspire and enrich new communities in the Church.

As a way of expressing this, we might say that a new seal is in play in these communities, a new form of Christian existence, both individual and communal, demanded by the changing times in which we live. Inspired by St. Paul, Fr. Kentenich said that to him, the Schoenstatt Movement is interested in the “new man” and the “new community.” The communities that he founded had a double focus: the idea of the “new man” and the “new community” had to influence all levels and all areas of Christian and ecclesiastical life, and be open, at all times, to Christians of any walk of life, gender, and profession, so that they could lead a genuinely Christian life in our times.

d. Priest and Teacher:

The mission that God placed on the shoulders of Fr. Kentenich was the foundation of the Schoenstatt Movement. To fully explain this mission, we must say that he was called to be priest and teacher.

All founders of religious communities, such as the orders and Church congregations, place a spiritual father, in both rank and function, at the forefront of the movement. This fatherhood is not possible unless the founder is also a teacher. Fr. Kentenich’s fate was no different. It should be added, however, that in his case the mission of priest and teacher had a particular reality and a singular depth. This reality is rooted in the many challenges of our times: the loss of faith in God as Father; the loss of the sense of authentic human paternity and authority; and finally, the waywardness of the family and the loss of the unique character of the family as an ideal for the Church and for the world. Fr. Kentenich would carry out his mission of building the Schoenstatt Movement through the application of effective correction of the three challenges mentioned previously. In his person and in his actions he would strive to make the Divine Fatherhood transparent, while at the same time he would clarify and restore, with the deepest meaning possible, the nature and dignity of fatherhood on earth. With Fr. Kentenich as our father, the Schoenstatt Movement, both in its entirety and in its branches, would be organized according to the model and structure of the family so that the essential and evident character of the Church as God’s family, with a family structure and environment, would serve as the model of our future Church.

e) Prophet and Instrument of the Blessed Mother:

No characteristic has marked both the person of Father Kentenich or his movement as much as his relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary. This relationship can be briefly summarized by one fact: he was a prophet and instrument of Mary.

1. He was the Blessed Mother’s prophet in two ways. In the first place, as he himself would say, he had the mission of rediscovering and proclaiming the glories of the Blessed Mother against the backdrop of today’s times: glories that he categorized into two points:

a. Mary is the example, the prototype, and the perfect image of the Church and of each and every Christian. Mary is the model for the new formation of the Christian person and the solution that God gives us to the deep anthropological crisis of our times.

b. Mary, alongside Jesus, is also the prominent, singular, unique instrument, at the service of the redemption of mankind. Fr. Kantenich explained this instrumental role of Mary in the following phrase: Mary is the “eternal companion and collaborator of Christ, King of all creation, in His work of universal redemption.”

2. In the second place, Fr. Kantenich’s prophetic mission did not only refer to the figure and activity of the Blessed Mother in general. Rather, he focused more on the concrete instrumental intervention of the Blessed Mother in today’s Church than on her intervention in a concrete place: in Schoenstatt.

Therefore, Fr. Kantenich had a double role: to be an instrument of this intervention, and once that had happened, to testify for, and to proclaim her; that is, after the transformation of the cemetery chapel of the ancient Schoenstatt monastery into Mary’s shrine, that it should become cradle of a “new man” and a “new community.”

In this mission, it is clearly seen that Fr. Kantenich would be an instrument of the Blessed Mother, as he would be throughout his entire life.

5) Discussion

6) Suggested Commitment:

Invite members to a deeper understanding of our Founder, through the Courage of Faith Novena or *Father Kantenich* (Ninth Biography) or another simple biographical book (such as *A Father to Many*, by Fr. Esteban Uriburu).

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 6

TOPIC: THE SCHOENSTATT SHRINE

OBJECTIVE:

See the Schoenstatt Shrine as a place of grace that aids in the renewal of our faith, of our marriage, family, and social lives.

1) Opening Prayer

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starter (options):

- Watch the video The Schoenstatt Shrine in Austin: <http://youtu.be/Q8qqqTYN-jc>
- View pictures of Shrines, and discuss if anyone knows any of them, and what experiences they've had in these places.

4) Content:

1. What is a Shrine?

- It is a special place of God's presence.
It is a sacred place where one experiences the strength and saving grace of God.
- It is a place of grace, where one receives special graces of intercession by the Blessed Mother or of a Saint. God asks for our collaboration and our attitude of faith when we visit them.
- It is a place of pilgrimage, to which we go seeking the graces that God gives there. Pilgrimages are necessary for the shrine's mission and message.

2. Origins of Shrines:

Shrines may have different origins – due to apparitions, (Guadalupe, Mexico), due to religious stories (Luján, Argentina), or due to human initiative (Pompeii, Schoenstatt).

3. Origin of the Schoenstatt Shrine:

Because of the difficulties of World War I, Fr. Kentenich invites the sodalists (members of the marian congregation) to transform the small chapel, used by the seminarians as a meeting place, into a site of pilgrimage and grace. Together they ask the Blessed Mother to establish herself there, and work miracles of grace, for all those who faithfully come to that place. (The Founding Documents, p. 27; 200 Questions about Schoenstatt, Question 168, p. 119)

4. Graces of the Schoenstatt Shrine:

The graces that the Blessed Mother wishes to give in our shrines are not physical miracles, but rather of conversion and inner transformation.

- ***Grace of being at home:***

By means of this grace, the Blessed Mother wishes to give us a very deep encounter with God our Father. She wishes to help us experience, her closeness, her love, and her protection. The Mother of God wishes to give us a “spiritual home.”

- ***Grace of Inner Transformation:***

By this grace the Blessed Mother seeks to help us become new men and women, holy men and women, capable of self-renewal and of renewing the world. She wishes to give us the light and the strength that we need, so that our lives will be transformed according to the Gospel. She wishes to transform us into authentic Christians.

- ***Grace of Mission Consciousness, or Apostolic Fruitfulness:***

She wishes for us to help her as instruments in her hands, to confront the great challenges of today’s times. She wants us to help in this new evangelization to which Pope Francis has insistently called us. Schoenstatt is an apostolic movement; it is not a club of self-sanctification. The Shrine is like an “apostolic workshop”, in which we are willing to change not only ourselves, but to help others change also.

5) Discussion

6) Suggested Commitment: Visit a Schoenstatt Shrine:

Confidentia Shrine

134 Front Street
Rockport, TX 78382
www.schoenstatt-texas.org

Cor Unum in Patre Shrine

17071 Low Rd.
Helotes, TX 78023
www.mountschoenstatt.org

Bethlehem Cradle of Sanctity Shrine

225 Addie Roy Rd.

Austin, TX 78746

www.schoenstatt.us

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 7

TOPIC: THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY: GIFT AND TASK

OBJECTIVE

Understand the Sacrament of Matrimony as:

- A gift for conquering and living the ideal of the Christian family;
- A task requiring effort, personal and matrimonial work, and participation in the sacraments: Reconciliation and Eucharist.

1) Opening Prayer

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starter:

- Each group member receives a prompt to answer individually, and later shares answers with their partner. They analyze the similarities and discrepancies of their answers, and arrive at a mutual answer to share with the group (see attached prompt).

PERSONAL AND COUPLE WORK PROMPT

If you were a marriage counselor, or were asked for personal testimony:

- How would you define marriage?
 - Why would you wish to marry?
- Discussion

4) Content:

The TOPIC, if possible, should be developed with the aid of a paper chart and/or a written outline that will be handed out to each couple, and which contains:

- a) The **definition of marriage** according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church is explained as a complement to what the couples previously expressed in the discussion (CCC, N° 1601)

1601 "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."⁸⁴ (CCC, can. 1055,1)

b) The Grace of the Sacrament (CCC, N° 1641, 1642)

1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God."¹⁴⁷ 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."¹⁴⁸

1642 *Christ is the source of this grace.* "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony."¹⁴⁹ 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,"¹⁵⁰ 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:

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined 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, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.¹⁵¹ (Tertulian, ux. 2,9; cf. FC 13).

a) Benefits and demands: (CCC, N° 1643 to 1654)

1643 "Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values."

1644 The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh."¹⁵³ They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving."¹⁵⁴ This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

1645 "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection."¹⁵⁵ *Polygamy* is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive.

1646 By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement "until further notice." The "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them."

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 seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. 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.

1652 "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."¹⁶²

Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: "It is not good that man should be alone," and "from the beginning [he] made them male and female"; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: "Be fruitful and multiply." Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day.

1653 The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. ¹⁶⁴ In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life. ¹⁶⁵

1654 Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.

5) Discussion

- What does the sacramental grace of matrimony specifically offer to the spouses?
- What are the fruits of the sacrament of matrimony?
- Life implications about the benefits and demands of marriage.

6) Suggested Commitment:

In the closing prayer, each member is invited to write to the Blessed Mother, regarding both marriage and family:



Blessed Mother, I ask for _____

Blessed Mother, I offer _____

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 8

TOPIC: A NEW FAMILY, UNITED IN LOVE, OF WHOLESOME ATTACHMENTS, ROOTED IN FAITH, AND MISSIONARY

OBJECTIVE:

To learn of Fr. Kentenich's vision of the new family for today's times.

- 1) Opening Prayer
- 2) Review Previous Commitment
- 3) Suggested Conversation Starter:

Read the following quote of Fr. Kentenich and Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* to the group:

Fr. Kentenich to a group of teachers

"It is, therefore, an existential problem for human society, especially for the Church and for the country, that their survival depends on wholesome marriages and families; if we wish to educate wholesome and virtuous citizens, then we must state that these virtues must be carefully and deliberately cultivated in the smaller family unit.

The Precious Value of Marriage and of the Family

Illuminated by the faith that gives her an understanding of all the truth concerning the great value of marriage and the family and their deepest meaning, the Church once again feels the pressing need to proclaim the Gospel, that is the "good news," to all people without exception, in particular to all those who are called to marriage and are preparing for it, to all married couples and parents in the world.

The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.

Willed by God in the very act of creation,(3) marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ(4) and have need of His graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin(5) and restored to their "beginning,"(6) that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God's plan.

At a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it, and aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family,(7) the Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the People of God.

Each couple answers this question, and shares with the group:

What are the main strengths, weaknesses, and threats, in the life of today's family?

4) Content:

Fr. Kentenich presents marriages in his vision of the new family essential in today's times:


"We have frequently said: we wish to be like the family of Nazareth that embodies the face of these newer times, of the newer Church."

Remember that the family's basic characteristics are described in "The Home Song" (Heavenwards, p. 158-161) called the canticle of family love, which is our Family hymn.

We speak of the whole family, where the natural is interwoven with the supernatural, and is therefore a vigorous, attracting, strong family. It is a family that is conscious of its identity and richness, nurturing, and open to changing social needs.

- **Family united in love:** a noble and wholesome love that unites all members, and opens the family to seeking the well-being of all others.
- **Wholesome family:** based in natural law, respecting the wholesome needs of all persons, not only united in love, but also in truth and justice.
- **Family rooted in the supernatural world:** a family that cultivates the encounter with the God of Life, adopts his will, and strives to build with Him as his instrument.
- **Missionary Family:** it is necessary that the fundamental cell of the Church, the Christian family, be evangelized, and so, in turn, become an evangelizing family.
- **Family united in love:**

*“Do you know the land so warm and dear
which Eternal Love has built itself:
where noble hearts beat with affection
and bear with each other in the joy of sacrifice;
where they glow and shelter one another
and flow as one into the heart of God;
where streams of love well forth with might
to quench the thirst of the world for love?”*



Father Kentenich proposes a model of holiness for marriage and family, modeled after the Holy Family of Nazareth. Holiness is the vocation to which all Christians are called, each according to his state. The value and originality of Father Kentenich’s teaching is that he lays out a path to holiness, a spirituality that is specifically based in marriage and families, different from that of religious and priests.

How can we sanctify ourselves through marriage and family life?

1. Part of Schoenstatt’s answer is to invite us to grow in our married love.
2. Teaching and serving each child’s original life.
3. Witnessing, with our life, the importance of renewed families.

a) Growth in married love:

- **First step: Learn to make each other happy.**

“Our mutual spousal love invites and demands, first and foremost, that we make each other happy... Be aware that the realm of love in all its forms is a realm of learning to love.... All love is selfish in its beginnings... At first, self-satisfaction and self-happiness are primarily placed; later, as the marriage matures the happiness of the other moves to the place of primacy.”

To mutually grow in love is to cultivate the attitude that: my first concern is the good of the other.

In expressing one’s love, one must certainly take account of tenderness, spontaneous communication, deep dialogue, the small details that bring joy to daily life, small gifts and services, a phone call, and the outings that rekindle affection.

- **Second step: Help each other to make progress on the path to perfection**
-

Father Kantenich tells us:

“All love represents a “making perfect” of man. Therefore, our married life must essentially guide us to a path toward greater perfection. For us married people, everyday married life offers many opportunities to advance on the path to perfection, and to help our spouses on the same path. For example, when we are constantly at each other’s side and experience each other’s faults, it becomes so difficult to maintain respect for each other! What a sacrifice and art it is for spouses to keep silent in front of others about the spouse’s failings!

When we must stand our ground, do we do it heatedly or with proper respect? When we must call certain faults to our spouse’s attention, how do we do it? Do we yell, or do we try to understand, with tact and respect, the other’s failings, striving to patiently help them to overcome them? We must not focus our married love on sexual love, but must carefully cultivate all ways of loving, up to the level of heroic love. Thus will our love mature, and the conjugal act will become a spontaneous and joyful expression of personal and spiritual communion.” (OME 20, p.117)¹

- **Third step: to crown the maturing of our married love with total and mutual fidelity.**
-

“That our conjugal love be crowned with the diadem of unbreakable fidelity”

What is fidelity? It is the maintenance, with much care, of the purity of our first love. The pure, flawless, and tried conservation of our first love.

“Infidelity refers not only to going with another man or woman. No, I am unfaithful when I no longer give my heart generously and totally to my spouse, when I no longer have time for my spouse, when, instead of spending time with my spouse, I spend my time on my favorite activities, when I am interested in everything else besides my own spouse and children.” (OME Vol. 20)

Faithfulness, then, is positively defined as the daily cultivation of married and family love in the areas discussed above. Father Kantenich adds that;

“We cannot remain faithful without religious practices, meaning without assuring ourselves of prayer time, nor receiving the Sacraments (Eucharist and Reconciliation), nor failing to try to make our love life a life of sacrifice (in whichever way this is needed). (OME Vol. 20)

b) Teaching and serving the original life of each child.

Children occupy a central position in the ideal Family of Nazareth, as was the position given to the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They must be nurtured by the community of love and rearing, formed by mother and father. Parents are the root of the family, and all else depends on their qualities. Therefore, it is essential that their relationship be wholesome and deep, strong and stable. Without these goals and their cultivation, a wholesome family will prove impossible. As parents and teachers, they must seek to reflect the paternity and maternity of God; for this task they need to support and complement each other. They should appear and act together to the children, with mutual standards and objectives in child rearing.

To achieve this unity, they must necessarily speak often about the children, their way of being and their development, what each one needs to be taught, how they need to be supported... A parent's most effective weapon in the raising of their children is their own example. They must first achieve in themselves, by teaching themselves, what they seek to teach and transmit. The cultivation of a close and permanent contact with their children is what makes this exchange of life and transmission of values and attitudes that shape a person possible. Confronting, together with the children, life's difficulties and situations that affect the entire family is an enormous help in the development of their values and will awake, in the children, a responsibility for their home life. In this environment, children will feel valued and supported by their parents, and will learn to share and to be in solidarity with them.

5) Discussion:

How can we practically cultivate and grow our natural love as a couple and as a family?

6) Suggested Commitment:

Invite the couples to make a time, before the next meeting to talk about the following questions:

- How do I make my spouse happy?
- On what part of our mutual love do we wish to work?

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 9

TOPIC: WHOLESOME FAMILY ATTACHMENTS (RELATIONSHIPS)

OBJECTIVE:

Recognize the importance of cultivating a wholesome, harmonious, and attractive family life

1) Opening Prayer

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starter:

Couples complete the following phrase (which may be written on a notecard):

Our family life is _____ because _____.

Example: Our family life is fun because we go places, have hobbies, etc.

4) Content:

The family is the place where we are privileged to live personal love, since here we find all types of personal relationships: man/woman, wife/husband, father/mother, among children, siblings, etc. One learns to have wholesome personal relationships in the family.

We want to consciously cultivate a **wholesome family environment**, without destructive tensions that rob us of joy, and are causes of physical and psychological issues (such as depression, trauma, complexes, etc.). We also wish to cultivate a cozy environment, happy, free, where each one can bring his or her originality, and their God-given talents. We wish to cultivate wholesome human relationships.

It is vitally important to respect the **wholesome needs of nature** such as: the needs for rest, entertainment, vacations, growth; **development of talents:** intellectual, athletic, artistic, etc.

As a family, we must find the paths that help us to develop all the creativity and means for our family to be entertaining, joyful, and attractive to each family member.

We also stress the importance of our family being open to others, with concern and care for our extended family and the world in social matters. Service to others, to the community, and to the less fortunate, is a great help to our wholesome growth.

We must grow in the consciousness of being able to positively influence our environment for the fostering of new ways of more wholesome entertainment and greater social commitment. All of this becomes an “insurance policy” for our children to be forgers of a better future, and to protect them from abuses such as alcohol and drugs.

We seek a definite balance between freedom, justice, and love.

Freedom: For example, respecting each one’s way of being, personal space, interests, hobbies, etc.

Our Founder compares justice and love to a net, where **justice** is like the threads, and **love** is like the spaces in between.

Justice: Is the proper balance between the time given to work and the time given to family. It is the establishment of clear limits and sticking to them: a **line in the sand** commonly agreed to and respected by all.

Love: Must be expressed with concrete loving actions and gestures.

5) Discussion

How can we develop freedom, justice and love in our family?

6) Suggested Commitment:

Have a family activity before the next meeting. (If there are childless couples, they should do a couple activity, or an activity with relatives)

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 10

TOPIC: FAMILY ROOTED IN FAITH

OBJECTIVE

Introduction to prayer life as a marriage and as a family.

1) Opening Prayer

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Conversation Starter (options):

- a. Ask a family to speak about their prayer life as a marriage and as a family.
- b. Ask the couples: How do we currently cultivate our relationship with God? (Holy Mass, Rosaries, etc...)

4) Content:

Our family does not grow wholesome and in harmony merely because we respect natural law and is united in mutual love, but because both of these are sustained by God, who is Father, who loves and protects the family.

Our Founder says of this:

“We rejoice in natural law, we rejoice in the successes and progress of technology and medicine. But we must not forget that natural law is not the ultimate and definitive norm of our thoughts, works, and lives.

I repeat the invitation: let us reaffirm ourselves, with both feet, on the foundation of faith.”

(On Monday Evenings [OME] Vol. 20)

Perhaps many of us need to conquer, or reconquer, our relationship with God. We wish to know Him in order to love Him, and to follow His loving plan. Precisely because our faith is not sufficiently deep, nor sufficiently strong, we must pray for its growth. We must often tell God “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.” (Mk 9:24)

For this, there is no other path other than learning to pray, to speak with Him, and to have confidence in she who can teach us the most effective way to pray: **Mary in her Shrine.**

If we call on her, she will take us by the hand and guide us to her Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. She will teach us to make God part of our life, for all our life; He who is not an abstract being, to whom certain rules apply.

We must much more often look upon the God of life. He is **behind everything** and He **comes** to encounter us through events, people, and especially our spouse and children. Yes, He always comes to encounter us, to tell us that **we are his children, and He loves us so that we can be happy.**

He also pursues his particular plan through the crosses that we bear and through our suffering. Perhaps He wishes us to come to Him, to trust Him.

We must learn to carry out that phrase “pray continuously.” That is, we must be in frequent contact with God. We must not measure our piety according to the number of prayers we recite, since we cannot accomplish much; rather, we must be in contact with Him throughout the day. We must learn to discover all that He gives us daily: a noble spouse, the healthy growth of our children, the fact that we are well fed... God also created the natural world for me; He created the stars, the sun, etc. Therefore, being with God is my joy because I can find Him in every little thing.

A story is told of a missionary who had grown accustomed to seeing God in everything, even in the most difficult to accept. His response to everything was “**just what I wanted.**” It is the art of seeing God’s will in everything that brings me to always say, “It’s just what I wanted. Let us remember that the Lord tells us that even should a mother forget her child, He will never forget us.

We are invited, therefore, to be Marian families, focused on both the natural and supernatural worlds.

5) Discussion

How would we describe our prayer life as a couple and as a family?
Do we have a home altar?

6) Suggested Commitment:

- Invite each couple to create a home altar
- Begin to pray together as a couple and as a family (Examples: nightly *Our Father*, *Consecration* prayers, etc.)

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 11

TOPIC: A MISSIONARY FAMILY

OBJECTIVE

Awaken the consciousness of the undeniably apostolic dimension of our matrimonial and family spirituality.

- 1) Opening Prayer
- 2) Review Previous Commitment
- 3) Suggested Conversation Starter:

Couples tell of their apostolic experiences (experiences they may have had in school, college, or parish ministries)

4) Content:

Holiness and Family Life to Give to Others

We invest in the building of our families so that we may help other families. We aspire to, and fight for, family holiness so that we might sanctify others. It is vital to develop this consciousness, and to **take advantage of all of the spirituality and teachings of Schoenstatt to shape ourselves as holy families, holy families that revolve not around ourselves, but rather as families that are called to mission, to radiate the life that we have.**



Our learning has an apostolic goal. Holiness is never for one alone. Holiness is a participation in, and is collaboration with, the holiness of the Church. Each couple, according to their spiritual commitment (ascetic practices, holy hour, particular commitments, etc.) strives to live their faith in the midst of the world, so that their holiness may bring life to others.

This is why it is important to develop a consciousness that our life is meant for giving it, it is for sharing. This becomes concrete through our apostolic activity:

through word, work, or actions. It is the light of our lives that attract other, who ask us to share the Word and actions that we live. Each family will carry this out according to the apostolic commitment that they have made in front of God and the Mother Thrice Admirable. It is normal for one's life testimony to speak louder than the testimony of our words and actions. These are two different, yet inseparable, elements. The prior is a condition for the latter.

Family Participation in the Life of the Church:

The Church needs the vitality of the family dedicated to the Church's renewal in our country.

“The family is one of the most important treasures of our people, it is all of humanity's inheritance. Therefore, we must adopt it as a transversal axis of the Church's evangelical actions.”

The church requires our testimony and committed participation in the ecclesiastical community. This participation takes shape in parish life, attending local Church convocations, becoming aware of its orientation and calling, and being attentive of its needs. From the Sanctuary we are sent as apostles, evangelizers, and witnesses to the joyful encounter with Christ.

Characteristics of the apostolic families of Schoenstatt:

In order to form apostolic families in the spirit of Schoenstatt, it is important to remember certain primary characteristics of the apostolate of our Work of Families. This permits us to grow according to these characteristics, and to strive for adequate spiritual formation, seeking the means that allow us to configure ourselves to these characteristics. (Fr. Rafael Fernandez, *The Tree of Militancy*, Paris)

➤ **An eminently lay apostolate:**

The apostolate of Schoenstatt Work of Families is an eminently lay apostolate. As opposed to priests and others whose lives are consecrated to the Movement, the members of the different Work of Families communities carry out their mission specifically in the world and from the world. This has to do primarily with the professional working field, but also in general with our consciousness of social responsibility, from a commitment to building a world in accordance with the values of the Gospel.

➤ **A matrimonial apostolate:**

The apostolic activity of the married couple is one in which each complements the other, each helps the other, and each supports the other, whether it be in joint or separate activities. In either case, it should be an activity that, through sharing and dialogue, becomes an element of matrimonial growth

➤ **An apostolate with a family charism:**

Our primary apostolate is to our family, the children and spouses, but beyond that, its focus is families both in and out of Schoenstatt, in and out of the Church. This apostolate must be family oriented not only in the sense of working directly with families (including the engaged, groups of married people, etc.), but in any social action (legal, judicial, social, political, ethical, educational, etc.), the perspective and commitment is for family values in accordance with the Magisterium's vision.

The idea is to be attentive to what we can do as Schoenstatt families in every sphere of life in which we exist to contribute to healing, supporting, and invigorating the family as the base of society.

In conclusion, we are essentially an Apostolic Family since our beginnings. In accordance with the spirit of our Founding Father, this apostolic character must radiate through a coherent and authentic lifestyle, to be an irresistible invitation for other families. Our aspiration to sainthood serves to build small domestic churches that enrich the life of the Church and contribute to the forging of a new culture.

5) Discussion

What can we do to become a more apostolic family?

6) Suggested Commitment

7) Closing Prayer

Meeting 12

TOPIC: FAMILY TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

OBJECTIVE:

Encourage the couples to embody their yearning for sanctity in concrete family and marriage traditions and customs.

1) Opening Prayer

2) Review Previous Commitment

3) Suggested Commitment (10 minutes):

Ask each couple to share family customs or traditions that they remember fondly.

- Each couple will share special traditions or customs they may have integrated in their own married and/or family life.
- Discussion

4) CONTENT:

Introduction:

Our meetings have been geared to show what Schoenstatt offers as its spirituality that enables us to live as Christians. Schoenstatt is a new way of living that should be imprinted on our marriage and in our families. This spirit should slowly be shaping our entire lives: I am Schoenstatt in my home, at my work, in my friendships, while on vacation, or when I participate in Holy Mass. The spirit and formation of Schoenstatt are intimately united, hand in hand.

For a spirit to become real, it must be expressed in form, or else the spirit will weaken, and its forms will fail. Someone once said, “not only does a pious man make a deep genuflection, but a deep genuflection makes a man pious.”

Our faith offers concrete paths to live it. Schoenstatt not only offers basic ideals, but also proposes a concrete path of living.

- Family Traditions/Customs:** a deep yearning for sanctity.

Schoenstatt is not satisfied with small things; it wants to make saints of its members. It wishes to respond to Christ's call in the Gospel: "be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect." (Mt 5:48)

Now, more than ever, Christ's invitation is valid, as we are living in times of profound crisis in all spheres of our existence. Therefore, our Lord tells us again, "be perfect," follow my paths. This calls us, as family, to create a new way of living that clearly states our disagreement with the world. Our yearning for sanctity must be expressed in traditions and customs of a different life, in holy customs and practices.

Our lifestyle is a calling of the Church:

We also wish to respond, with much strength and courage, to the call that is made by the Church, a calling to which we wish to respond with coherent lifestyles. The Holy Father tells us, in the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, "the first Christians, coming from both the Jewish people and the Gentiles, were differentiated from the pagans not only by faith and liturgy, but by the testimony of their moral conduct."

Our Holy Father Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, wrote in his commentary on this Encyclical: "If Christianity is defined as The Way, this means that above all this indicated a specific way of living the faith, not as pure theory, but as a way of life, a *praxis*. The new conviction offered here has an immediate and practical content: **faith includes moral action.**

Our Founding Father, around the 1930s, in his prophetic vision said, we must overcome the piety of Sunday, with the piety of a workday, of daily life."

Schoenstatt is much more than a pious or religious Movement; it aims to be a Movement shaped by a profound religiosity, but with a clear aim of transforming the world.

The Consciousness of contrast:

The pagan lifestyle that surrounds us requires the *cultivation of a critical attitude*, which dares us to doubt ourselves, asking ourselves, "how are we different from others?" How are we raising our children, what are our values in this materialistic and permissive environment? We must have the courage to be different, and to not simply do what others do.

It is necessary for us to cultivate a *Conscience of Mission*, as we have a mission in our environment, in the times in which we live. We are called to be the seeds of a new culture.

For example:

- I am constantly bombarded on the television with offers for cable programming and entertainment. I will not subscribe without learning in more detail about these offerings, and am not primarily motivated to subscribe by whether I can afford them or not.

- ❑ I've noticed that many parents at my child's school do not set reasonable times for birthday parties to end at night. On the other hand, when I organize my child's parties, I endeavor to make it entertaining, while at the same time I make sure to note that there is an ending time for the party.

- ❑ **Matters that span our family traditions and customs:**

In all human matters, without exception, our entire being, in all areas in which these matters unfold:

In religious matters:

Is it obvious that our family is Catholic, that our home is Christian?

Do we have a home altar, a Bible, a crucifix, the image of the Mother Thrice Admirable?

Do we attend Sunday Mass?

Do we pray together as a married couple, with the children?

Do we bless our food before meals?

In family and matrimonial matters:

Do we eat together at least once per day?

Do we "see ourselves" as a married couple, do we talk?

Do we celebrate birthdays and anniversaries together?

Do we visit our relatives, our parents, our grandparents?

Do we spend time having family conversations, or do we watch too much television?

In recreational matters:

Do we entertain ourselves as a family?

Do we play with our children?

Do we go out together?

Do we have fun together?

In material matters:

How do we spend our money? Do we control our spending?

Do we know how to save? Do we have a monthly budget?

Do we take care of our material goods?

Do we raise our children with small demands and obligations?

Do we practice simplicity in a materialistic world?

Do we share what we have with the needy?

Do we pay our share to the Church (tithe)?

Let us make Mary present to the world, through our family traditions and customs, so that she may bring Christ to our lives!

5) DISCUSSION:

What traditions or customs foment a wholesome family life?

What traditions or customs, fostered by the media, are contrary to family life? Give examples...

6) COMMITMENT

7) CLOSING PRAYER

ATTACHMENTS

GUIDE FOR GROUP PRAYER

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 “repetition” 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 member seated. Previously, a **prayer leader has been designated** to lead the prayer. This is the person who invites member 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.

Prayers

(HEAVENWARDS, Fr. José Kentenich)

CONSECRATION

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 me and defend me
as your property and possession.
Amen.

GOOD INTENTION

What I bear and endure,
what I say and what I dare,
what I think and what I cherish,
all the merits that I gain,
what I direct and what I conquer

all my joys and all my sorrows,
what I am and what I have,
I give to you as a gift of love.
Use it so that the holy stream of
graces flowing richly from the shrine
may fill the souls of those
who have given their hearts to
Schoenstatt and gently lead there
all those whom you wish to choose
in kindness. Accept everything that
our efforts may be fruitful which
dedicate to the Trinity.

TRUST

I trust you might, your kindness, Mother dear,
 I do believe that you are always near.
 Schoenstatt's great Queen, O Mother mild,
 I blindly trust in you and in your child.

HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit,
 You are the soul of my soul.
 I humbly adore you.
 Enlighten me, strengthen me,
 guide me, comfort me.
 Reveal your wishes to me
 as far as this is in accordance
 with the will of the Eternal Father.
 Show me what Eternal Love wants of me.
 Show me what I should do.
 Show me what I should suffer.
 Show me what I should humbly and
 thoughtfully accept, bear, and endure.
 Holy Spirit, show me your will
 and the will of the Father,
 for I want my whole life to be nothing else
 than a continuous, and everlasting yes to
 the wishes, to the will of God, The Eternal Father.

LET ME GIVE THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

For everything, yes for everything let me give
 heartfelt thanks,
 clinging to you, Mother, with tender love.
 What would have become of us without you
 and without your motherly care!

Because you delivered us from great need
 and bound us to yourself in faithful love,
 I will give you thanks, be grateful for evermore
 and dedicate myself to you with undivided love.

IMITATION OF MARY

Let us walk like you through life,
 let us mirror you forever:

strong and noble, meek and mild,
peace and love be our endeavor.
Walk in us through our world,
make it ready for the Lord.
Think in me, O Mother,
that my thoughts be clear and bright;
speak in me, O Mother,
that my speech be true and bright;
work in me, O Mother,
my work is then well done;
then holy is my labor,
my rest a holy one.
You penetrate my being,
fill every part of me,
that all your ways and conduct
in me each one can see.

Glory be joyfully given to the Father
through Christ with Mary, highly praised,
in the Holy Spirit full of splendor
from the universe now and in all eternity.

GROUP DYNAMICS

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Listed below are exercises that may be used as ice-breakers during meetings, used for training in human relationships. These ideas for getting to know each other can be used in conferences, classes, or any other kind of group meetings.

- 1. SUPERLATIVES:** Participants are asked to attentively study the composition of the group, and find a superlative adjective that describes him/herself in relation to the other members. (Examples: youngest, tallest, most closed, etc.) Members share their choice, and verify, with the group, the accuracy of their perception.
- 2. HOME:** Post a large map of the city on the wall, and ask each member to write their name and address on the proper place on the map, while telling the group about their home. (While speaking of their home, members discover important details about themselves.)
- 3. DEMOGRAPHICS:** On a white/blackboard, the group lists all details that they would like to learn about each other, such as age, marital status, education, etc. Members take turns supplying these details.
- 4. PROGRESSIVE DISCOVERY:** Post sheets of paper, one for each member, on the wall. Members write their name on the sheets, and then follow, in turn, 4 stages of self-opening. First, each writes their favorite letter of the alphabet on their paper, goes back to their seat and explains why they made that choice, while other members ask questions. In stages 2 to 4, members identify their favorite word, favorite phrase, and, finally, their favorite prayer.
- 5. DESIGN:** Two small groups are formed to brainstorm about how to get to know each other. A representative for each group is chosen, and these two meet in the middle of the room to plan an ice-breaking activity.
- 6. DRAWING A CLASSROOM:** Participants each receive paper and pencils, and are given instructions to draw a classroom. They have five minutes to work individually in this first phase. After all have finished, they post their drawings in the front of the room and walk around the room IN SILENCE for ten minutes. They are then asked to get together with those people, in groups of two or three, whose drawings they have found interesting to talk about them. Afterwards, small groups are formed for discussion about the drawings, and the groups then share with the whole group.

LABELING CARDS

OBJECTIVE:

- I. Uncover the capacity for self-opening of the members;
- II. Discover the personality traits of each member.

TIME:

Duration of 45 minutes

GROUP SIZE:

Unlimited

Divide participants into small groups of 5 – 10 members

PLACE:

Normal Room

A spacious, well lit, and comfortable room.

MATERIALS:

Easily procured:

One deck of cards (previously prepared by the moderator) for each small group.

TIMELINE

- I. Leaders prepare, in advance, a set of cards for each small group. Cards are prepared in the following manner:
Cards are made with 3x5 notecards, on which different qualifying adjectives (both positive and negative) are written, such as: honest, happy, introverted, extroverted, studious, athletic, aggressive, etc. There must be at least five cards per person. Therefore, if there are 8 people in the small group, there must be at least 40 cards for that group.
- II. Once gathered, the Moderator divides the large group into small groups of 5 to 10 members.
- III. Leaders explain the activity to the small groups: "The deck of cards is placed on the table in the middle of the group. A volunteer pulls the first card, and if they identify with what's on the card, they keep it. If that is not the case, the card is placed next to the deck and the person to their right has the opportunity to keep the card or to pass." This continues until all members have had a turn to take or pass on the card. If nobody has taken the card, it stays on the table and the round continues with the next card from the deck.
- IV. Each small group receives their deck of cards from the Moderator.
- V. The game continues until the entire deck has been used.
- VI. In large group, each participant shows his/her cards to the group and explains why he/she identifies with the words. The group may participate by asking questions.
- VII. The activity continues until all members have presented their cards.
- VIII. The leaders lead a discussion with the purpose of discovering the life lessons of the activity, and how they can be applied to our lives.

WORLD EVENTS AND THEIR IMPACT

OBJECTIVE:

- I. Introduction of participants
- II. Self-discovery of personal values and beliefs.
- III. Identify life values.

TIME:

Duration of 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE:

Unlimited

PLACE:

Normal Room

Large, well-lit, and comfortable room that with tables or desks.

MATERIALS:

- I. Large photographs picturing important historical events, and/or
- II. A recording of an important event, and/or
- III. Notecards with the names of important world events.
- IV. Bulletin board for posting photographs.
- V. Old magazines, glue, and markers

TIMELINE

- I. Leaders show a recording and/or chart of important events in the history of humanity.
- II. Leaders invite participants to think, individually, of three famous events that have impacted them for some reason. They should also recall:
 - How did they learn of these events?
 - Why did they have such an impact on them?
 - What did it make them think?
- III. Leaders ask the participants to share the three events, how they found out about them, why they had an impact on them, and what it made them think. As each participant presents, other participants ask questions and/or add their own comments.
- IV. Guided by the leaders, the group evaluates the sharing activity. Helpful questions may be:
 - What was the purpose of this exercise?
 - What have we learned about each other?
- V. According to the events that the group found to be impactful,
 - What values are we concerned with?
 - What has the activity taught you about the group?
- VI. Once finished, the leaders ask the participants to use their imaginations and think of what news events they would like to hear.
- VII. Participants are then invited to share their answers in the form of an illustration. Markers, magazines, glue, etc. Are handed out and a reasonable amount of time is assigned.
- VIII. Participants share their news events to the large group, and the Moderator uses them to make a collage. While telling of their event, participants also explain why they would want this event to occur. When all have presented, the Moderator asks follow-up questions, such as:
 - Has anyone's perception of the group changed? Why?
 - What would be an event the whole group would like to hear of?
- IX. The leaders lead a discussion with the purpose of discovering the life lessons of the activity, and how they can be applied to our lives.

THE EPITAPH

OBJECTIVE

- I. Provoke the sharing of self;
- II. Identify common characteristics of group members

TIME:

Duration: 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE:

Unlimited

Divide participants into small groups of 5 – 10 members.

PLACE:

Normal room

A large, comfortable, and well lit room is needed so that participants can disperse and write comfortably.

MATERIALS:

Easily procured:

- I. One copy of the worksheet "The Epitaph" for each member.
- II. Drawing of a tomb.
- III. Pins or adhesive tape.
- IV. Markers for each participant.

TIMELINE

- I. The group leaders show the drawing of the tombstone, giving a brief explanation of the purpose of epitaphs.
- II. The leaders ask each member to imagine their own tomb, and asks "What would you like your tombstone to say? Member should write it in the form of an epitaph.
- III. When finished, members post their epitaphs on their chests and walk about the room so that all members can read them.
- IV. Each member finds another member who has an epitaph with similar characteristic, and they talk about it for four minutes.
- V. In whole group discussion, each member introduces the person with whom they spoke.
- VI. The leaders lead a discussion with the purpose of discovering the life lessons of the activity, and how they can be applied to our lives.

MAKE YOUR OWN BAG

OBJECTIVE

- I. Increase confidence levels and sharing in group
- II. Create a greater consciousness among group members of themselves and of others.

TIME:

Duration: 105 minutes

GROUP SIZE:

12 participants

Divided into pairs.

PLACE:

Special room

A large, well-lit, and comfortable room with moveable carrels.

MATERIALS:

Simple

- I. Paper bags.
- II. Scissors for each member.
- III. Glue.
- IV. Variety of color magazines.
- V. Small outdoor objects (such as leaves) if possible.
- VI. Crayons

TIMELINE

- I. Leaders explain the rules for making a bag:
 - On the outside of the bag, make a collage expressing how you think others see you.
 - On the outside of the bag, make a collage expressing how you think others should see you.
 - This is done without anyone's input or help.
 - Nobody needs to share what is inside the bag.
- II. The leaders direct the participants to find a place to be alone and to make their bags, indicating that there will be a time limit of 20 minutes. (Time may be extended if people are still working after 20 minutes).
- III. When all participants have finished, the leaders ask them to form pairs, and to share their bags with each other (to share all that they feel comfortable sharing).
- IV. Once finished, the leaders will direct each pair to choose another pair with which to share their bags.
- V. Once the quartets have finished sharing, the leaders will ask for one quartet to split, in order to form two groups of six, in which bag sharing will be repeated.
- VI. The leaders then gathers the groups into one large group to hold a discussion about how the activity made them feel, whether anyone had an interesting experience, and how they feel after the activity. The leaders assist in analyzing the activity, and generalizing the results.
- VII. At times, the large group decides to share their bags with everyone, but this is not necessary for the success of the activity. Rules for making the bags may be changed to adapt to the group's needs. For example, instead of using the guidelines mentioned above, the leaders might use:
 - a. Characteristics that you find easy/hard to reveal to others.
 - b. How you see yourself now/in ten years.
- VIII. The leaders guide the group through a discussion of how group members can apply what they've learned in the activity to personal growth and life lessons.

ABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

OBJECTIVE

Create a consciousness of personal capabilities and limitations, and which ones are possible to develop or change.

TIME:

Duration: 30 minutes

GROUP SIZE:

Unlimited

Divide participants into small groups of 5 – 10 members.

PLACE:

Normal Room

A spacious, well lit, and comfortable room.

MATERIALS:

Simple

Sheets of paper and pencils for each participant.

TIMELINE

- I. Leaders distribute paper and pencil to all participants.
- II. Leaders ask participants to list, on the right side of the paper, all their gifts, talents, abilities, resources, and strengths, while on the left hand they will list weaknesses, limitations, disabilities, and mistakes.
- III. The leaders underscore that all areas should be reviewed:
 - a. Physical;
 - b. Intellectual;
 - c. Emotional;
 - d. Spiritual; and
 - e. Social.
- IV. After finishing the list, participants are asked to analyze their answers, and to mark a "C" next to those that can be changed, a "D" if it is something that can be developed, and an "N" if neither change nor development is probable.
- V. The leaders form groups of 4, asking them to discuss their answers and find an answer to the question "what do I need to accomplish this?"
- VI. In a large group, each small group shares their discussion and conclusions.
- VII. The leaders guide the group through a discussion of this activity's lesson can be applied as life lessons for personal growth.

IMAGES OF MARY IN THE BIBLE













