



*We're getting married*

# Marriage preparation guide



We're getting married – Marriage preparation guide

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# INTRODUCTION

The Catholic church holds marriage in very high esteem. The mutual love between man and woman is an image of God's absolute and indestructible love for mankind (cf KKK 1604). This is the reason that the church also has a long tradition of preparing couples for the reception of this sacrament.

The three preparatory meetings help the couple to learn more about each other, to become aware of how they communicate, but also to learn more about the meaning of a Catholic marriage. During the preparation time, it is of course also important to make sure that it is possible to enter into a Catholic marriage. The final step is a run-through of the wedding ceremony.

The situation in which we meet with couples in today's Sweden is rather special. In countries with a Catholic majority, there is a common knowledge about the meaning of a Catholic marriage, but in Sweden, this cannot be taken for granted. When the couples we meet lack a basic knowledge of the meaning of a Catholic marriage, the preparatory task becomes all the more important.

Many people who wish to enter into a Catholic marriage have for different reasons lost contact with the Church entirely, and some live in its periphery. Getting married is an important step in life, an unprecedented situation that may encourage people to re-evaluate their lives, their future and possibly also their existential foundations. This is a situation that may bring about a renewed interest in religious faith. Those who prepare the couple for marriage have a golden opportunity to welcome people back and make them find new paths to faith and to church as adults. Marriage preparation can also be an opportunity for evangelization.





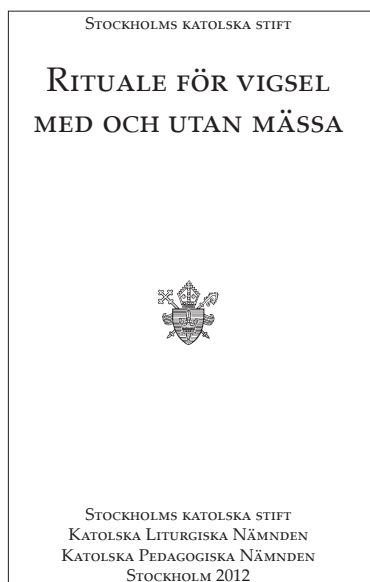
## The *We're getting married* kit also includes



### 1. *We're getting married* – Information booklet for the couple

This booklet contains a summary of the Catholic Church's view of marriage as well as practical information before the wedding. The booklet should be made available to anyone interested, for example in the church porch or at the parish office. Encourage the couple to read the booklet – or, at least, the parts that apply to them – before you meet for the first time. Here, they will learn which forms they should

bring along for the meeting, which saves time for other questions they may have.



### 2. *Rituale* for the rite of marriage

Give this booklet to the couple at the first meeting, so that they can study it at home and possibly choose readings and prayers. At the third meeting (or the last one before the wedding), you should go through the liturgy together. The booklet has been written with special concern for the many bridal couples that are not familiar with church rituals. Encourage the couple to make notes in the booklet about what you have agreed upon and what music they would prefer. The *rituale* is also available in a hardcover edition, for use by the priest/deacon at the wedding.

# THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE COUPLE

## Purpose

- To get to know the couple and find out if the requirements for a Catholic marriage are fulfilled in the specific case
- To identify any possible impediments like previous marriages, obvious misunderstandings about the nature of marriage, mental disorder, or refusal to have children
- To make the couple aware of potential areas of conflict in marriage and to initiate a discussion between the parties about these areas
- To find out if it will be necessary to apply for some exemption before you will be able to marry the couple
- To start filling in the *Marriage notification* form ("Anmälan om vigsel"). Appendix 5 contains the diocese guide to the form *Application for Matrimony* ("Anmälan om äktenskap")

## Duration

Approx. two hours

## Materials

Worksheet 1 and 2 (Worksheet 1 should be color copied and cut into cards)

## To consider before the meeting

### *Practical preparations*

Usually, the meeting will take place on the congregation's premises. Keep in mind that many couples are unfamiliar with such an environment and may feel lost and confused. When you set the time for the meeting, make sure that they know how to find the way to the congregation and the exact location. Some may be nervous and feel that the church is about to judge them and their lives. They may initially be shy and quiet. The worksheets for the first meeting are intended to help solving such problems. Make sure that both parties have their say, not only one of them. Describe briefly how many times you will meet and what will be discussed at each meeting. Then everyone knows what to expect.

If one of the partners is non-Catholic, this may be the first meeting ever with a Catholic priest/ deacon or the first visit to a Catholic church. If so, you may want to end or begin the meeting by showing the church and sharing some information about the congregation. (Do not assume that the Catholic party is familiar with "everything" – many years may have passed since catechism.)

Ensure that you will not be disturbed. Even if you have a lot of work, it is important that the couple feel that you have time for them. You may meet many couples, but for them, this is a unique experience.

There are often many things that need to be arranged before a wedding. Offer paper and pen and encourage the couple to take down notes and to ask about everything that seems unclear. Write down what you have agreed on. There is no need to address each issue already during the first meeting – there will be other occasions.

Agree upon a time schedule for the wedding ceremony. Have you already booked a priest and a church? Are all needed documents ready? Have relatives and friends been invited, is the party venue set and booked?

It is a good idea to pray for the couple before the meeting!

### **Talking with the couple**

Aim for a balance between closed-ended and open-ended questions that allow the couple to talk more freely. Try to avoid the impression of an interrogation or interview.

First, ask the couple to tell you about themselves, their lives and their relationship. Go through the booklet with their questions and answers and see if there is something you need to address and discuss further. Your main objective is to find out if this couple fulfill the requirements for a Catholic marriage. If there are any obvious impediments (such as one party being already married in the eyes of the church – often when having married in the Church of Sweden and then divorced – or the couple having decided not to have children), they may already be aware of this after having read the booklet in advance before the meeting. But don't be too sure. There are both factors that prevent a marriage and factors that make it more difficult for a marriage to work. You must discover any obvious obstacles. In addition, you should help the couple to become aware of difficulties that may occur in their relationship.

### **Use the form *Marriage notification ("Anmälan om vigsel")***

You may discover and address obstacles when filling in page 2 and 3 of the form.

- Does the couple already live together?
- Are there already children in the picture?
- Is there a major age difference between the couple?
- What are the practical circumstances for a successful marriage between the two?  
How does the financial and household situation look? How do they support themselves?
- Where have they grown up?
- Do their backgrounds differ in a significant way, culturally or socially? When you get married, a new family often comes along. The couple have chosen each other, but not chosen the partner's family. How is the relationship with their current family and relatives? Are they in regular or rare contact? Disagreements in this issue is a common source of conflicts in relationships. It is perhaps more common for a wife to have problems with her mother-in-law than for a husband with his. Are there any siblings? Have they grown up with both their parents? Are there any remarriages or deaths in the families? Any diseases or medical conditions that run in the families?
- Has the Catholic part received his/her first communion and confirmation? Does he/she practice his faith? Marriage preparations can be a good opportunity to reconnect with the Church. For a "lukewarm" Catholic, this current contact with the Church may be of vital importance for the future.

### ***Issues to discuss with the couple already at the first meeting***

- The mutual agreement on faithfulness and understanding that marriage is for life
- That both parties are ready to have children
- That the Catholic part has understood that their children should be raised Catholic and that the non-Catholic part agrees to accept this

### ***Worksheet 1. Solving the "life puzzle"***

The first worksheet consists of 24 pieces with different colors and words. These pieces shall be assembled into a 12-piece puzzle. The idea is that the couple together shall decide which pieces that should be included and which can be omitted.

Hand out the 24 pieces.

The couple should now jointly combine them into a mutual 12-piece "life puzzle".

When the puzzle is assembled, ask the couple to tell you about their joint puzzle and why it looks the way it does. Ask them also to explain why certain pieces have been omitted.

This is a chance to discover if it seems difficult for the couple to agree on what should be included in the puzzle.

Additional exercise: Ask the couple to jointly rank the pieces in order of importance.

### ***Worksheet 2. Do you agree? Discussions on possible areas of conflict***

Children • Money • Relatives • Home • Division of labour • Leisure time

Whether the couple is in agreement or disagreement in these issues can be discovered by filling in this worksheet. Pay special attention to any possible differences when answering the questions that concern children.

## **Ending the first meeting**

It is a good idea to end the meeting with a prayer, possibly the following:

Father, we thank Thee for having brought us together.

We thank Thee for the joy you bring us and for the wonderful gift of life. Now we more than ever understand the value of this gift. Help us to cherish the riches you have placed in our hearts. Teach us to love unselfishly, make our love pure and strong. Give us both wisdom and clarity, so that we together may build something that will last for life. Help us to understand that this is a call from Thee. Together, we will now begin our journey towards a mutual goal. We are ready to walk together, for better or for worse. Help us to accept changes and disappointments, help us understand that you are always with us, in prosperity and in adversity.

Thou who have given us love and Thyself wishes to make it complete, let Thy name be hallowed, now and forever.

(Oremus, 2008, #387, adapted)

Finally, show them the church and tell them about the congregation, should they not be familiar with it already.

### ***Items for the couple to take home after the first meeting***

- Appendix 2. *Some reasons why marriage is a good idea.*
- The booklet *25 questions and answers on Catholic faith* (Swedish language only)
- The booklet *How to survive being married to a Catholic*, available from Katolsk Bokhandel
- If the couple already has children, give them a copy of the book *Baptised... what now?*
- Catholic faith, folder 22, *Love and marriage* (KPN). A summary of the church's teachings on marriage, which does not avoid the difficult questions. (Available from [www.kpn.se](http://www.kpn.se), Swedish language only)
- *The love of life* – Pastoral letter on love and marriage from the Bishops of Scandinavia, 2005.
- The *Rituale* booklet for the rite of marriage. Inform them that you will go through this during the third meeting, but that it may be a good idea to study it beforehand
- The folder from Respekt on Natural family planning

## **THE SECOND MEETING WITH THE COUPLE**

### **Purpose**

- To ensure that there is a mutual agreement to marriage and that both parties wish to enter marriage by their own free will
- To identify any possible impediments through individual talks with each partner
- To complete the *Marriage Notification* form ("Anmälan om vigsel").

### **Schedule**

The first part of the meeting will be a joint discussion, followed by individual, private talks with each of the partners. Then end with a common reflection of the meeting.

### **Materials**

Black-and-white icons (copy worksheet 3 and cut them out). Pens and pencils. High-quality letter-paper and envelopes. Worksheet 3–5.

### **Duration**

Approx. two hours

### **To consider before the second meeting**

Now is the time for individual encounters with the couple. The idea is that both the man and the woman should feel free to tell and ask you anything, and that you can make sure that both parties are entering into marriage of their own free will. In Sweden, many persons hesitate to talk about their faith even within their own family. Prepare something for the other part to do while they are waiting during the individual talks, if you don't want them to write letters, like filling in worksheet 4B. Remember that some people do not like to write, so it may be a good idea to have another option available.

There are two kinds of impediments to marriage, those circumstances that are in conflict with divine law and those that are in conflict with church law. The first law applies to everyone, the latter to Catholics only. Divine law forbids certain persons to marry: those who are close relatives, those who are completely unable to perform intercourse, and those who are already married in the eyes of the church. No church authority can grant exemption from such impediments. If you believe that impediments in the eyes of the church may be at hand, contact the Diocesan Official.

If both parties or one of them belongs to an oriental church, and you are a Latin Rite Catholic, remember that the oriental churches have their own canon law. Contact the Bishopric for the Oriental Churches or the Diocesan Official before you wed the couple.

## **To begin with**

Ask the couple if they have any questions regarding the last encounter. Have they studied the materials that you handed out?

Check out their time plan and the practical planning. What has been done since the last meeting? Have they made arrangements with the church musicians and the sacristan? Make sure that all necessary bookings are made in time.

Then do the first exercise.

### **EXERCISE 1: What is my view of what a marriage can be?**

1. Lay out the black and white icons from worksheet 3 on a table. These symbols represent various values, character traits and emotions. Ask them to study them silently and then choose three icons that represent what a marriage can be. Ask them to explain their chosen images to each other and to you. Let them keep the chosen icons for the next step.
2. Then ask them to choose two further icons that represent what they want their marriage to be twenty-five years from now. Ask them to explain the chosen images.
3. Have them put the chosen images next to each other. What does it say about the life together they wish for themselves? Will they discover that anything is missing? If so, let them together choose one more icon.

#### ***Issues to discuss with the couple***

- Who or what is the main influence behind their view of marriage?
- Are their parents and relatives married? Have they experienced parents or friends separating? Why did this happen, they think?
- How do their families feel about the upcoming wedding? Who has the main say about the wedding: the couple, his family or her family? Are they satisfied with this order?
- Are the couple's friends mostly married or unmarried?
- What do they believe to be the general opinion about marriage among their friends and in the society of today? Do they agree with this?
- Do they have the same view of marriage now as in their teens? If not, why have they changed their minds?
- Why do they want to marry in the church?

### **EXERCISE 2: What is the church's view of marriage?**

The purpose of this exercise is to discover possible questions or prejudices surrounding the Catholic church's teachings on marriage. Building on the words they have picked out, you can give teach them about marriage. This way, your tutoring will become relevant for the couple in question and their specific needs. There are so many things you want to talk about regarding marriage and you will probably not have time for everything. This exercise will help you identify the teachings that are the most important for the specific couple.

Give the couple one copy each of worksheet 5 and ask them to circle five words that they associate with the Catholic church's teachings on marriage and family. When they are finished, ask them to explain to each other and to you why they have chosen these five words. Begin with the words that they both have chosen.

### ***Further to this discussion***

What do these particular words mean to the couple personally, in their relationship? How do they react to them – positively or negatively? Try to present a profound, nuanced view of the Church's teachings on mankind and family.

### **Individual talks with each partner**

Some people may feel uncomfortable talking individually with a priest, especially those who are not practicing Christians. Such a situation often spurs many questions, both those regarding faith and doubt and those concerning the Church's standpoint in various controversial issues. Aim for a trusting atmosphere where doubts and uncertainties can be expressed. Also be attentive to what remains unsaid but may be expressed by gestures, intonations, etc. As in all pastoral care, it is important both to show mercy on human weakness and to be clear about the Church's teachings about marriage. Is it likely that those who may still be lacking in maturity and basic comprehension about marriage have the power to grow and evolve? After all, there is a big difference between being immature at the age of 20 and at the age of 40. Is the couple "homogeneous" with respect to maturity or is there a major difference between them? Do they seem to share the same expectations of life? Have they already experienced difficulties together, and how were those solved? Much guidance can be gained from the exercises and the initial talks of the meeting.

How much do they seem to talk to each other about prayer and faith? Couples may sometimes have difficulties sharing these issues with each other. It may be regarded as too private or too sensitive to talk about. If one of the parties seems to be in need of counseling, do not hesitate to offer further talks in the future. If you have any doubts about marrying the couple, ask them to come back for further discussions. Always remind the Catholic partner that a good confession is a vital part of the preparations for a wedding ceremony. Surely you wish the best possible start for your new life together? Are you confirmed? If not, have you considered adult confirmation?

### **Activities for the other partner**

While you have an individual talk with one of the partners, ask the other one to write a letter to his/her future wife/husband. Worksheet 4, "To my beloved" (not numbered), can be used to facilitate the writing process. Of course, the letter can be written in their mother tongue. When the letter is finished, they should put it in the envelope, seal it and write the partner's name on the outside. If they do not finish in time, encourage them to finalize the letter at home. The partners should not reveal the content to each other beforehand, but hand over the letter at their convenience.

Alternative activity for those who don't wish to write a letter: Worksheet 6.



## Listening and talking to one another

Communication is a vital part of a sound relationship. When partners no longer can talk with one another, this is a clear sign that they have a problem. Human beings communicate in many ways, not only through spoken words. Men and women are different and there are also major individual differences that affect our attitudes and behaviors. Different cultures also have different communication patterns.

## Worksheet 6

Ask the couple to individually fill in Worksheet 6. Then jointly discuss their answers. Different opinions is no fault, there is seldom only one "correct" way to deal with things. In order for differences to become an enrichment rather than a burden to a marriage, it is important that we learn to listen to each other, as well as to clearly express what we mean. No matter how much we want to, we are not able to read each other's thoughts. For those who want to learn more, there are many books to read about communication in close relationships.

Give them worksheet 8 to take home. If there is time, you can talk about the content. Point out that it applies to all kinds of conversations, and not only between spouses.

## Ending the second meeting

Thank the couple for having shared a part of their lives with you. Before concluding today's meeting, you can, if appropriate, pray The Lord's Prayer with the couple. You may want to ask them to hold each other's hands during the prayer. Then pray in your own words for the couple's preparation time before the wedding and end with a blessing.

## Home assignment after the second meeting

- Finish the letter "To my beloved" and place the envelopes where they can be found.
- Look through the liturgy booklet and decide which readings and music they would like.
- For Catholics: Ensure that there is time to prepare and make a good confession before the wedding.
- For non-Catholics: Reflect on if there is anything else you would like to know about the Catholic church, before marrying a Catholic. Have you studied the booklet *How to survive being married to a Catholic?*
- To search their hearts and to reconcile with God, and talk about it with a priest from their own community or with the Catholic priest preparing the marriage.
- To look through the materials they received after the first meeting, if they have not already done so.

## Regarding the second meeting

Should it seem convenient for you and the couple, the individual talks can be conducted on another occasion. There is much to discuss during the second meeting. If possible, it might be a good idea to divide the schedule into two meetings. If so, the third meeting can begin with the individual talks, followed by the subject of communication.



## **THE THIRD MEETING WITH THE COUPLE**

### **Purpose**

- To plan the wedding ceremony together with the couple
- To make sure the couple understands that a wedding ceremony in church is a liturgy service
- To, through questions and practical preparations, lessen any pre-wedding anxiety and render the couple open to the spiritual dimension of the ceremony

### **Schedule**

Have the couple remember or imagine a positive experience of church service and ritual and to possibly use this to enhance their own wedding.

### **Materials**

One copy each of a liturgy booklet, a *Cecilia* songbook and a bible, as well as a Missale (if mass is to be celebrated). Appendix 3. Paper and pens.

### **Duration**

Approx. two hours

### **What has happened since the last meeting?**

Check how all preparations are proceeding, if the time plan is holding up, if there are any questions or concerns that have not yet been addressed.

### **EXERCISE 1**

Ask the couple to take a few minutes to silently contemplate their most recent visit to church. What was the reason for their visit, and what was their experience like? Ask them to separately write down their impressions on a sheet of paper.

Alternative question, if one or both parties cannot recall their last visit, or never have visited church at all: What would they want church to be like? How would their ideal church and service be structured?

The two options will either display the couple's experience of an actual visit to church, or their preferences regarding church service.

### ***To consider before proceeding***

If the couple are completely unfamiliar with church, its organization and traditions, this is most likely the first time that they become aware that there are various kinds of church services. It is probably also the first time that they talk to someone about this. This means that you should be patient with any critical remarks and suggestions they may have. Do not immediately disregard their ideas as unrealistic or impossible.

## **Preparing the liturgy**

Things to settle and double-check during this meeting – the main part of them should already have been touched upon during previous meetings. See Appendix 3.

- Time and place for the wedding ceremony. If they have chosen another church than the parish church, what is the reason for this? Is the church available at this point of time? If this is certain, has the couple and/or you visited the church in question? How many guests are expected to attend the ritual?
- Will Mass be held at the wedding?
- If this is an ecumenical wedding, will a non-Catholic priest participate? Has any non-Catholic priest been asked or booked?
- Have any musicians been booked? If not, can the church suggest any musicians? Are there pages/bridesmaids?
- Choice of music: entrance music, entrance hymn, music following the marriage vows (if applicable), recessional music, recessional hymn
- Which readings and which gospel do they prefer? Have lectors been selected/booked? Do they want readings in another language than Swedish?
- Read through the nuptial vows and have the couple practice reading their parts aloud. Encourage them to ask questions if any wording seems unclear or odd.
- Which intercessions would they like to use? Should anything specific be added to the intercessions? Who should read them?
- Will there be a printed wedding program? What will it include?
- Should the church be decorated? If so, in what way?

## **PRACTICAL EXERCISE**

Visit the church and show the couple where to stand and walk. Make it clear that you will show them when to stand up, sit down and kneel during the ceremony, and that they need not worry about this. Have them practice kneeling, standing up and walking up and down the aisle.

Decide upon a time for the couple to arrive in church on the wedding day, and if they need to be there beforehand for any kind of preparations. Is there anything else that you will need to discuss or agree upon before the actual wedding?

## OUTLINE FOR A JOINT PREPARATION WITH SEVERAL COUPLES

If practically possible, a marital joint preparation course with several couples can be very rewarding. Such a preparation may well be arranged as a weekend course. It is preferable if there also are several leaders. Encourage married couples in the congregation to participate. Check which skills may be available in the congregation. Are there any psychologists, midwives or family counselors that could join to share their knowledge and experience? The most important thing is not always the lectures as such, but rather to provide the couples with an opportunity to talk about things out of the ordinary. These materials can be used for such a course, and you may also want to add group exercises and joint discussions. Feel free to contact KPN if you plan to hold such a joint course and need further ideas and materials.



## **CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN MARRIAGE**

Many marriages in the Catholic church in Sweden take place between a foreign-born Catholic and a Swedish-born non-Catholic. Often this is encounter not only between different faiths and confessions but rather between different cultures. But also in the case when both parties are Catholic, there is no guarantee that a Catholic from Nigeria and one from Croatia share the same conception of their religious faith.

It is important that also non-Catholics share their questions and inquiries during the marriage preparations. Welcome non-Catholics to learn more about the Church, even if there are no intentions of conversion. Help the couple to distinguish between what is Catholic and what belongs to a particular culture, where there is room for compromises and what is non-negotiable. Your congregation probably includes other couples that live with different faiths and cultures within the family. Try to arrange for the couple to meet other such couples. Especially if there are problems, it can be fruitful to see how others have resolved their conflicts.

Many cultural differences become sharper and clearer when it comes to family and children. It is vital that the couple already in advance have a thorough discussion about their faiths and traditions. Their choice of lifestyle is not a personal issue but will affect also their relatives and, needless to say, their children. Everyone wants the best for their children, but there is not always an agreement on what is best. To be a Catholic in Sweden is to belong to a minority. You will never be like "everyone else" – for better and for worse.

# **INTERFAITH MARRIAGE**

This section is based on an essay by sr Katrin Åmell OP in *Äktenskap där religioner möts* ('Marriages where religions meet'), The Christian Council of Sweden's monograph series #16, and has been adapted for this booklet.

## ***Pastoral aspects***

How might the Catholic church and its priests best support spouses living in an interfaith marriage? What are the most important issues to keep in mind during contacts with couples who are of different faiths? Surveys in the UK have shown that in those cases when the spouses have been left to themselves, dismissed from their respective religious congregations, the strain and tension is bigger than when the parties have upheld such contacts and been subject to support from the congregation. Thus, pastoral care and local congregational support should not be neglected.

## ***Practicing faith or not***

If neither of the spouses actively practice their faith, they are not aware of any problems that may arise in an interfaith marriage and therefore do not worry about them. What must however be taken into account when one party is not a Christian, is that much of European culture has its roots in Christian tradition – whether ethical values or customs and traditions of important holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Even if the spouses are unaware of the importance of such cultural customs, research shows that they are emotionally charged and that tensions easily arise if such customs are called into question.

If only one of the spouses actively practices his/her faith, it may seem the simplest solution that he or she – the one who is concerned – also makes the decisions concerning religion. This may work in good relationships where tolerance, mutual respect and flexibility are prevalent, but it is unrealistic to assume that the non-practicing party should be completely void of religious motivation or emotion.

If both spouses are practicing their religion, there will be more need for reflection and resolution than in the other two cases. To try to avoid the problems and difficult choices that are likely to follow, the spouses are wise to try to anticipate these concerns and discuss solutions before entering into marriage.

## ***Different perspectives***

One of the reasons why interfaith marriages are becoming more frequent is that people who have grown up in multireligious societies from early on have received impressions from different directions. They have friends and family relationships across cultural and religious borders. They may also have lived in different parts of the world and thereby acquired a rather cosmopolitan identity.

People who have relationships and marriage plans outside of their own cultural group may experience various reactions from their environment. Those who are religiously active may be concerned that their faith will lose future members or strength. Especially the issues that concern children's religious affiliation and education are sensitive and subject to potential frustration.

### ***Identity and belonging***

Interfaith marriage raises the question of identity. What is an identity in different cultures and religions? How is identity defined and maintained? What aspects of identity have different importance in different social, cultural and religious contexts? In many cultures, the family identity – “family” here often including a large number of relatives – is far more important than the individual identity. The custom of arranged marriages, where parents see it as their duty to appoint a suitable spouse, is related to this emphasis on what is considered appropriate for the family rather than on the individual’s own desires. In these cultures, the individual identity is heavily influenced by family affiliation.

Often, the Western concept of individualism is defined as contrary to the family-centered pattern described above. The individual follows his/her own path and shapes a unique identity out of various impulses and choices, while the family’s wishes and desires are considered less important. But although individualism is strong in the West, personal identities are not formed in a vacuum but in social contexts that include family, school, religion, working life and so on. These different kinds of “belongings” affect your identity. It can be regarded as a loss if, for example, due to an interfaith marriage, you are forced to distance yourself from something that is an integral part of your identity.

Entering a relationship with a person from another culture and/or religion can be both exciting and enriching. Especially at the beginning of the relationship, it is easy to become fascinated by the other person’s traditions, values and social environment. But people develop, and what once seemed new and enriching changes over time. After a while, it may also be obvious that people’s ability to adapt to changes and different values alters.

### ***Learning about the other person’s religion***

Knowledge of the other person’s background and life context is a good prerequisite for every personal relationship. This also applies to religious background and affiliation. Those who are not themselves practice religion may think it is of less importance for this context, but as already stated, there is no doubt that many customs, values and beliefs stem from faith and religious practice. Therefore, in order for the parties to understand each other better – why they think or act the way they do – it is a good idea to learn more about each other’s religious traditions already at the beginning of the relationship. As a priest, you can encourage the couple to get to know each other’s different religions and to attend worship services and ceremonies according to each other’s tradition.

Since their faiths will be part of the couple’s life together, it will make things easier if they are able to communicate to each other what their faith is about at an early stage. To talk to one another about religious teaching, crucial decisions in religion, experiences of faith and religious life, is often a pleasant way to share concrete knowledge with one another. Furthermore, it is not unusual that people gain a deeper understanding of their own faith and traditions when they share stories with each other.



### ***Talks before the wedding***

In the talks preceding an interfaith marriage, it is necessary to be prepared to handle a number of topics in addition to the "regular" marriage talks. Proper information right from the start helps the couple to reflect on how they want to form their interfaith cohabitation after the wedding. The priest should explain the Christian/Catholic idea of marriage, and point out the differences that exist with regards to marriage beliefs and traditions in the religion of the non-Christian partner. The purpose is to provide genuine facts that allow the couple to make conscious and responsible decisions.

The priest must also initiate talks about each partner's freedom to practice their religion. This is a matter of principle which requires practical solutions. Sometimes the parties have implicit expectations of each other, which at a later stage turn out to be unrealistic. The risk for misunderstandings and conflicts can be reduced if the couples together with the priest discuss and clarify what they expect from each other with regards to religious practice, holiday celebrations, dietary restrictions etc.

A very crucial issue that requires attention is the children's religious identity, which should preferably be decided upon before marriage.

The introduction to this section stressed the importance of congregational support. It may thus be valuable to the couple if the priest can introduce them to appropriate persons or groups in the congregation. In some larger congregations, marriage courses are held, but organized courses focusing on interfaith marriages are rare. Still, it can be valuable for couples from two different religious traditions to join a group and talk with others whose preparatory issues are similar.

### ***The wedding ceremony***

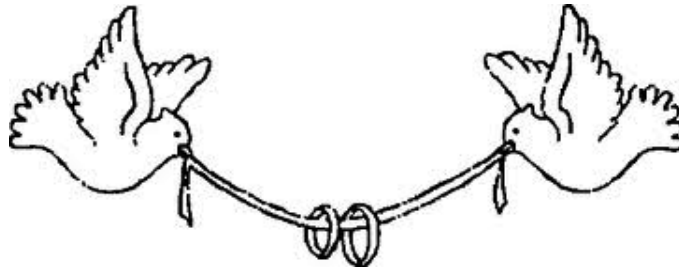
Since each interfaith wedding is unique, there are few detailed prescriptions for the execution. The priest/deacon must be responsive to the bridal couple's wishes and decide whether they are in accordance with the Catholic wedding ceremony or not. (Also check with The Commission for Interreligious Dialogue in the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm.)



# CELEBRATING MARRIAGES IN YOUR CHURCH

## Candlelight dinner

Invite married couples in your congregation to a romantic afternoon and evening. After a few years of marriage, it can be healthy as well as fun to look back in time a little. What made you fall for each other? Provide the couples with some playful exercises. Let them for instance write each other letters on the theme: *What made me fall in love with you? What do I appreciate most about you?* The letters are not for others to see and are not intended for any joint presentation or discussion. A mass is then celebrated where the couples renew their marriage commitment. After mass, a joint candlelight dinner is served at cost price.



## Silver or golden wedding anniversaries

On wedding anniversaries, especially the 25th and 50th, a Mass of Thanksgiving can be celebrated – when such are allowed – with the prayers listed below. The same prayers can also be used in a weekly mass "throughout the year". The following prayers can be used in this mass.

### *Silver anniversary, 25 years*

#### *Collect prayer*

Lord, you have united your servants N. and N.  
by the unbreakable bonds of marriage  
and in this their union you have upheld them in sorrow and in joy.  
Strengthen and purify their love,  
so that they (together with their children)  
may grow in sanctifying grace.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

#### *Prayer over the gifts*

Lord, accept the sacrifice  
that we bring forth in gratitude for your servants N. and N.  
so that they here by your altar  
will gain strength from your peace and joy.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

#### *Prayer after communion*

God, you have let these spouses (with their children and friends)  
come to your table.  
Give them strength and joy and bring them even closer together,  
so that they once may be united for ever  
at the great feast in heaven.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

***Golden anniversary, 50 years***

*Collect prayer*

Almighty Father, look in grace to these your servants N. and N.  
(and their children, to whom they conveyed the gifts of life and faith).  
Think about their good deeds during a long life together,  
and bless their old age,  
like you once confirmed their first love  
with a great and wonderful sacrament.  
Through your Son...

*Prayer over the gifts*

God, accept our sacrifice,  
which we bring forth along with your servants N. and N.,  
who have now lived together for so long time  
in mutual and sincere faithfulness  
and pray for continued unity and peace.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

*Prayer after communion*

You have nourished us, Lord, with your precious gifts.  
Preserve your servants N. and N.  
and let them live a long and blessed life  
until they both, old and full of days,  
may join the great feast in heaven.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

*(From Missale for The Catholic Diocese of Stockholm, 1987)*

# **SUGGESTION – MASS FOR RENEWAL OF MARRIAGE VOWS**

## **Greeting**

## **Entrance hymn**

## **Kyrie**

Thou who at the wedding in Kana treated the lovers with love's new wine,  
\* renew our love for each other.

Lord, have mercy.

Thou who gave yourself to the Church, your beloved bride,  
\* purify us, so that our love reflects yours.

Christ, have mercy.

You who call us to your wedding feast in the glory of heaven,  
make us faithful to one another

\* so that we may become our beloved's way to heaven.

Lord, have mercy.

## **Collect prayer**

Heavenly Father, you who have created everything,  
already in the beginning you united man and woman.

Bless and strengthen the unity between your servants N. and N.,  
so that they grow into an image  
of Christ's union with the Church.

Through your Son...

## **Readings (suggested)**

Col 3: 12-17 or Rom 12: 9-21

## **Responsorial psalm**

Ps 100

## **Gospel**

Jn 22: 1-11 or Jn 15: 1-8

## **Credo**

## **SUGGESTION – MASS FOR RENEWAL OF MARRIAGE VOWS**

### **Intercessions (suggested)**

*Priest:*

Dear brothers and sisters! The couples gathered here today once entered the sacrament of marriage before the Lord's face. Let us pray that God, our Father who brought them together, also will bring their union to completion.

*Reader:*

1. Lord, you have created us in your image. Help these spouses to be a sign of your unselfish love, we pray:

2. Lord, give us your Holy Spirit who guides us through darkness and light during life's journey home to you. Then we pray:

3. Lord, bring your peace and joy to those who have failed in their marriages, those who have never found a life partner and those who suffer in their solitude. Let them experience value and meaning in their lives. Then we pray:

4. Lord, we commend to you our dead, especially the deceased relatives and friends of the couples, and pray that you welcome them in your eternal glory. Then we pray:

5. Let us think for a moment in silence about someone or something that is particularly close to our hearts. (PAUSE) We ask you this, Lord.

*Priest:*

Father in heaven, you have created the entire world and you have created man and woman in your image. May your blessing rest upon those spouses who wish to renew and affirm their union in you. For this we thank and praise you, now and forever.

*All:*

Amen.

### **Renewal of marriage vows (suggested)**

*Priest:*

Dear couple, you have come here to renew your marriage vows before the Lord.

May Christ richly bless your love.

May he strengthen you to faithfully fulfill the mutual responsibility of your marriage.

Therefore, I ask you:

Are you willing to live together throughout your life as spouses, in mutual love and respect?

*The couples:*

Yes.

*Each couple takes each other's right hand. Together they renew their marriage vows.*

*Man:*

I promise you, my wife, to be faithful to you for better and for worse, in sickness and health, and to love and honor you during all our days.

*Woman:*

I promise you, my husband, to be faithful to you for better and for worse, in sickness and health, and to love and honor you during all our days.

*Priest:*

May God in his goodness confirm and bless  
the consent you have renewed.

What God once has put together, no one may separate.

May the Lord bless and sanctify you in your love for one another  
and complete the work he once initiated.

*Couples:*

Amen.

### **Prayer over the gifts**

Lord, accept our gifts and prayers  
for this sacred covenant,  
and lead their (N's and N's) destinies,  
you who have brought them together.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

### **Preface: On the dignity of marriage**

V The Lord be with you.

R And with your spirit.

V Lift up your hearts.

R We lift them up to the Lord.

V Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

R It is right and just.

R Yes, it is indeed right and just  
that we should bring the sacrifice of praise, and proclaim thy glory,  
almighty, eternal God,  
gracious heavenly Father.

You have instituted the marriage covenant  
and sanctified its indissoluble band,

for new people to be born  
and become your children  
as the fruits of a faithful and unremitting love.

For in thy wisdom, O God,  
you let unimaginable miracles occur:  
you let people be born to rule over the earth,  
and you let them be born again in your church  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through him we sing your glory  
with the angels and all your saints:

### **Sanctus**

### **Eucharistic prayer 2**

## **Our father**

## **Communion**

## **Hymn**

### **The solemn blessing**

May the Lord Jesus, who wanted to be present at the wedding in Kana, bless you and your friends and relatives

R Amen

May he, who gave himself to the Church, always fill your hearts with his love

R Amen

May he make you into witnesses of his resurrection and let you joyfully await his return in glory

R Amen

God almighty bless you all, the Father and the Son + and the holy Spirit

R Amen



**KIDS**



**WEEKEND  
COTTAGE**



**CAREER**



**PETS**



**CAR**



**TRAVELS  
ABROAD**



**WORKOUT/  
SPORTS**



**HOME  
RENOVATION**



**BOAT**



**OUTDOOR  
LIFE**



**SPENDING TIME  
WITH HER  
FAMILY AND  
RELATIVES**



**GARDEN**



**STUDIES/  
EDUCATION**



**SPEND TIME  
WITH FRIENDS**



**HOBBIES  
(MALE)**



**SPEND TIME  
TOGETHER**  
- ONLY THE TWO OF YOU



**SPENDING TIME  
WITH HIS  
FAMILY AND  
RELATIVES**



**HOUSEWORK**



**GOOD  
COOKING**



**HOBBIES  
(FEMALE)**



**ENTERTAINMENT,  
CULTURE,  
READING**



**TIME FOR  
YOURSELF**



**CHURCH/  
CONGREGATION**



**OTHER**

**WRITE:**

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## DO YOU AGREE?

### Purpose

You may have already talked to one another about some of these issues, but maybe not each one. Take your time to think through the questions and do not show the answers to one another until both have finished. Then you can shift papers and talk to each other about the answers. Have you given different answers to several questions? Don't take it too seriously. This reflects your opinions here and now, today. You may change. But maybe the issues where you have different opinions could be discussed – hopefully calmly and cheerfully – when you get home.

To be happy, it is important to share the same interests

- Strongly agree*
- Generally agree*
- Partly agree*
- Disagree*

Three words that describe what love means to me

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

I want us to get married in church because

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When we're married, I will spend this much time on my leisure/sports activities:

- Same as before*
- Slightly less than before*
- Much less than before*
- Don't know*
- I don't have a time-consuming leisure/sports activity*

When we're married, I will spend this much time with my friends/clubbing/nightlife etc:

- Same as before*
- Less than before*
- I will cease seeing my friends/clubbing/nightlife etc*
- I do not regularly spend time with my friends/clubbing/nightlife etc*

That my wife-/husband-to-be likes my family and relatives is

- Very important to me*
- Rather important to me*
- Not that important*
- Does not matter*

To be liked by my partner's family/relatives is

- Very important to me*
- Rather important to me*
- Not that important to me*
- Don't know*

When I think about the place where we will live after marriage, I feel:

- Fully satisfied*
- Quite satisfied*
- Unsatisfied*
- I wish we could move someplace else as soon as possible*

Who shall handle the following household chores:

|                                | <i>Me</i>                | <i>My wife/husband</i>   | <i>Both</i>              |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Wash the dishes</i>         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Cook</i>                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Take out the garbage</i>    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do the laundry</i>          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Change fuses/lightbulbs</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Iron</i>                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Clean the laundry room</i>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Make the beds</i>           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Vacuuming</i>               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Washing windows</i>         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Repairs</i>                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Sweeping the floors</i>     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Household shopping</i>      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

My faith/religion is

- Very important to me, I wish to practice it regularly*
- Rather important, I wish to practice it for Christmas and Easter*
- Not that important*
- Unimportant, honestly I don't care*

My opinion on money/finance is (multiple choices possible):

- We should have individual bank accounts*
- We shall have a mutual bank account*
- I want us to make financial plans and prepare a budget*
- I don't worry much about money, it usually solves itself*
- I am ready to lead a simple life to be able to afford a house/a bigger apartment*
- To me, travelling is more important than being able to afford a house/a bigger apartment*
- It is important to me that we have exclusive furniture and home furnishing*
- I don't mind hand-me-downs and second-hand stuff. I'd rather spend my money on other things*
- I am willing to work less to be able to spend more time with my family*
- I worry about how we can be able to afford the things we want to own and do*
- It is important that we share our blessings with the less fortunate*

When I think about our marriage and my parents' marriage, I want them to be:

- Very similar*
- Rather similar*
- More different than similar*
- Our marriage will be completely different*

I have \_\_\_\_\_ brothers/sisters. I am the oldest/a mid-child/the youngest/a single child/a twin.

I believe that this may have affected me in the following manner:

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This is how I want to celebrate Christmas:

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and I want to celebrate it with \_\_\_\_\_

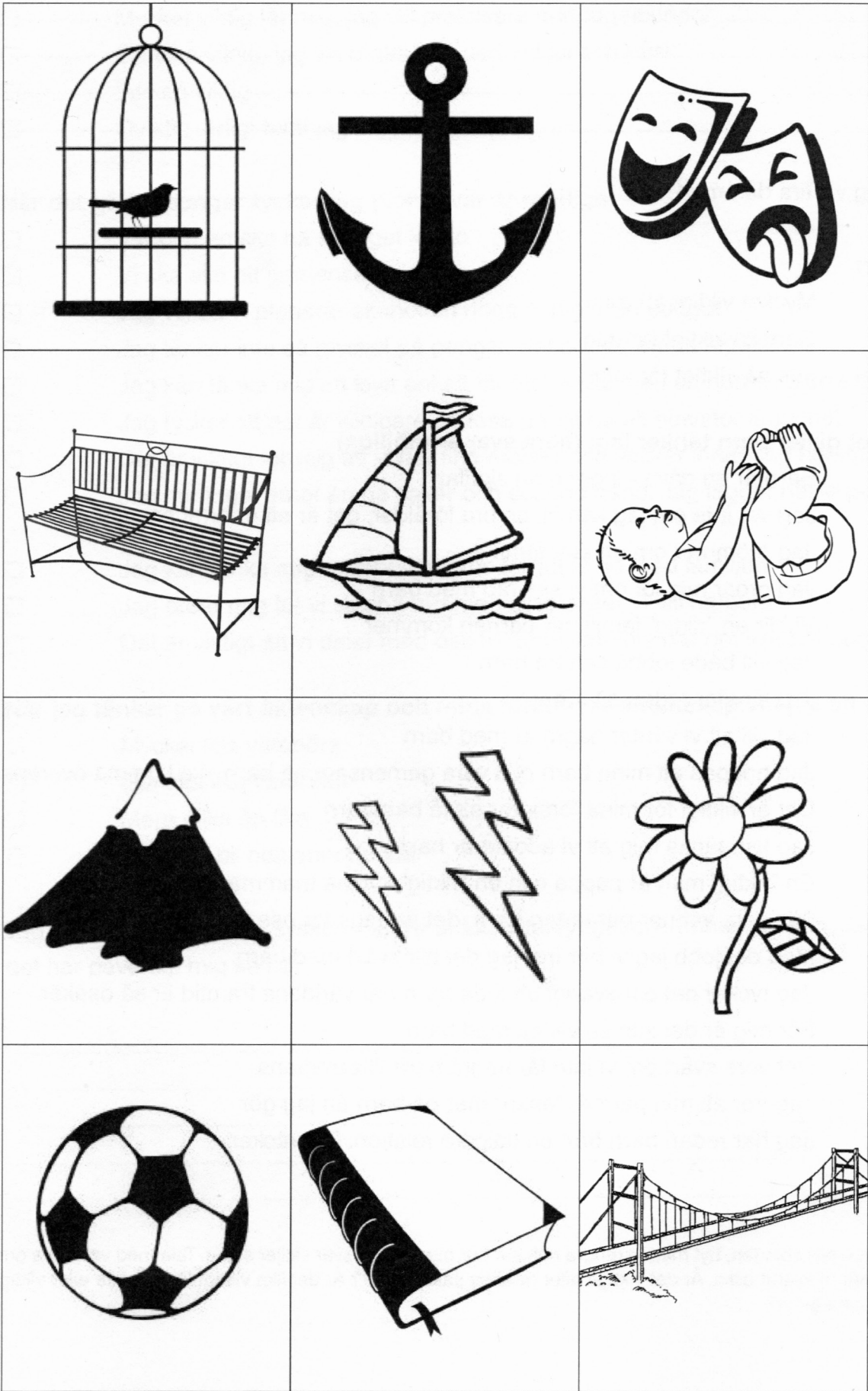
This is

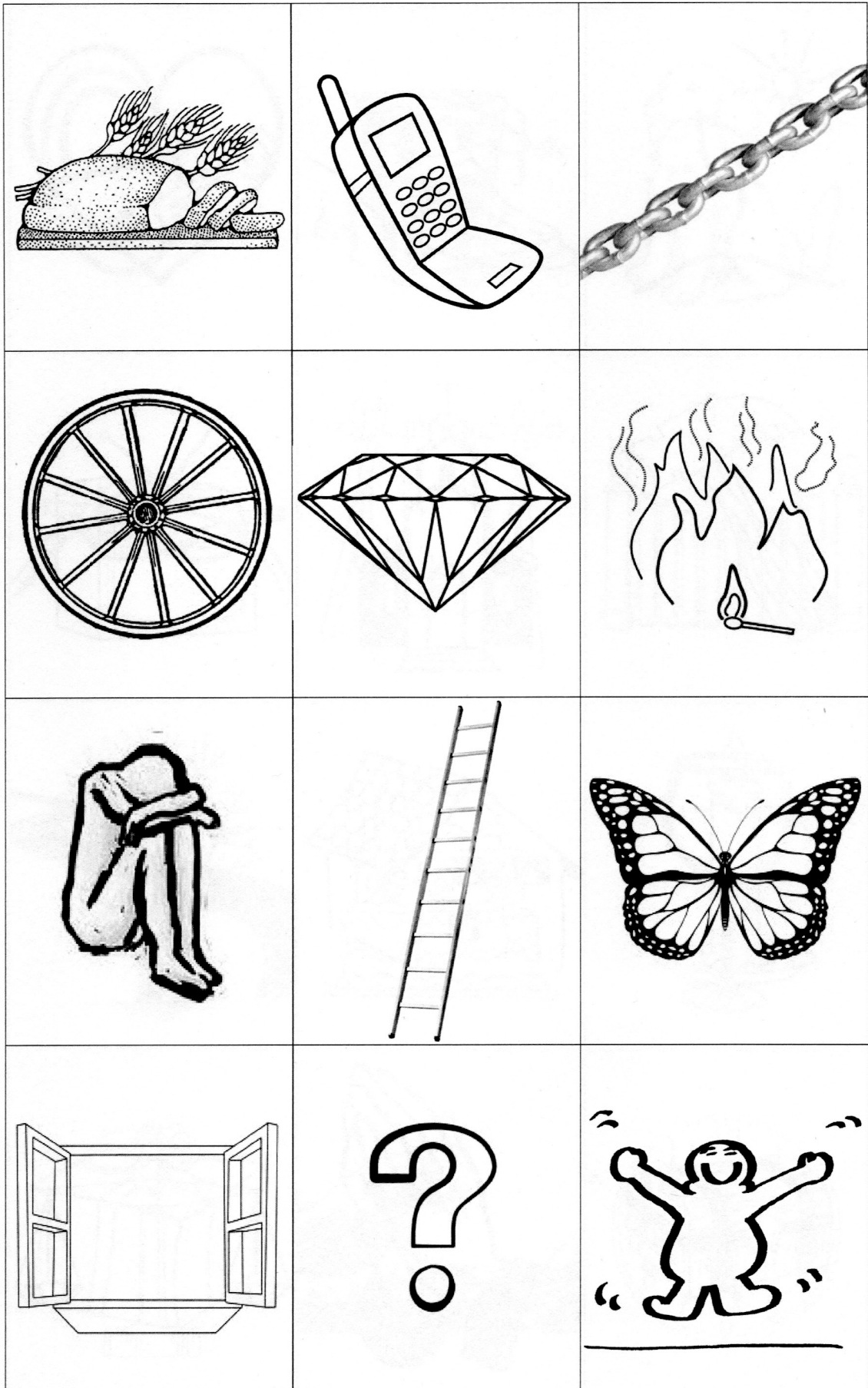
- Very important to me*
- Rather important to me*
- Not that important to me*

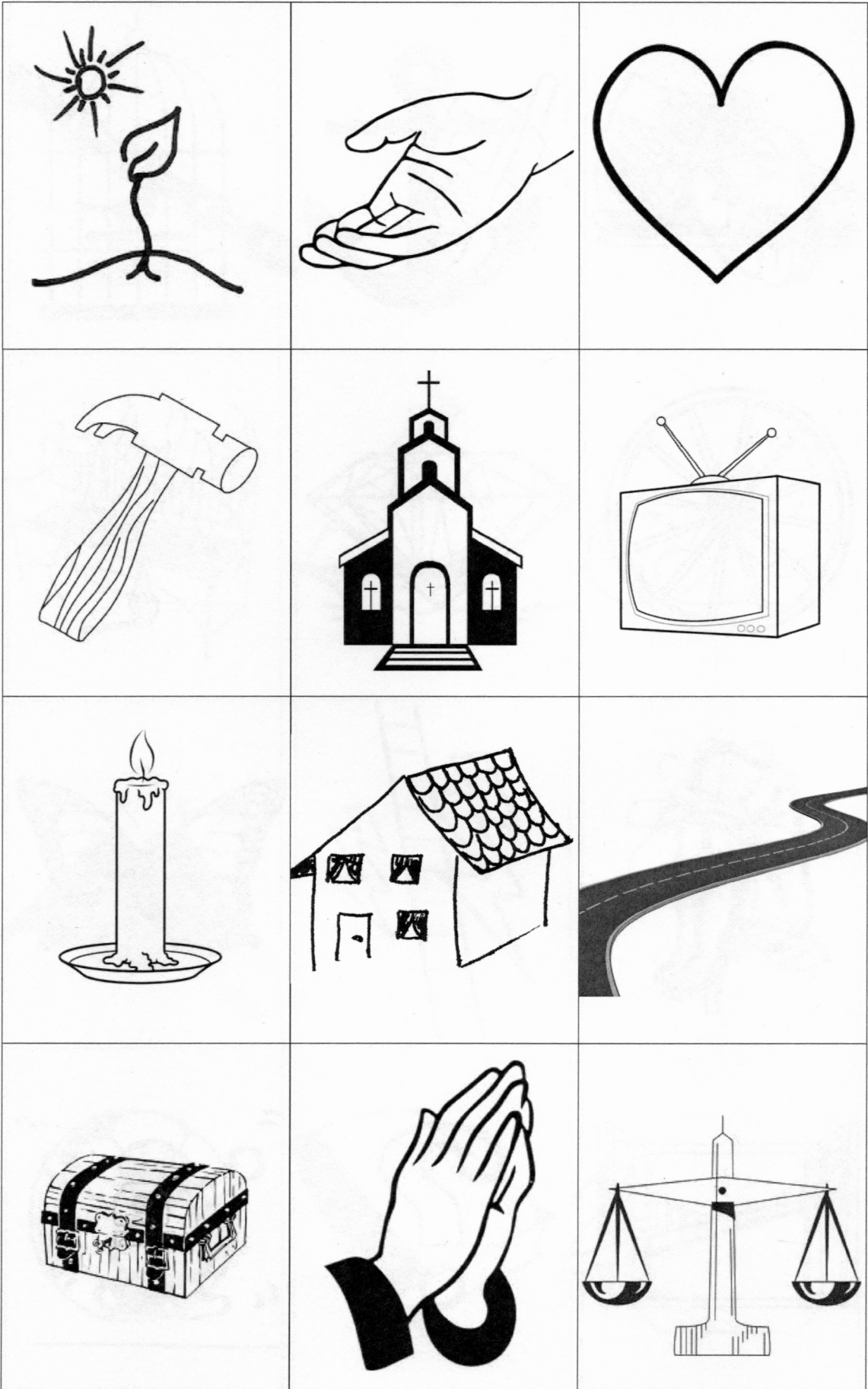
These are my thoughts regarding children (multiple choices possible):

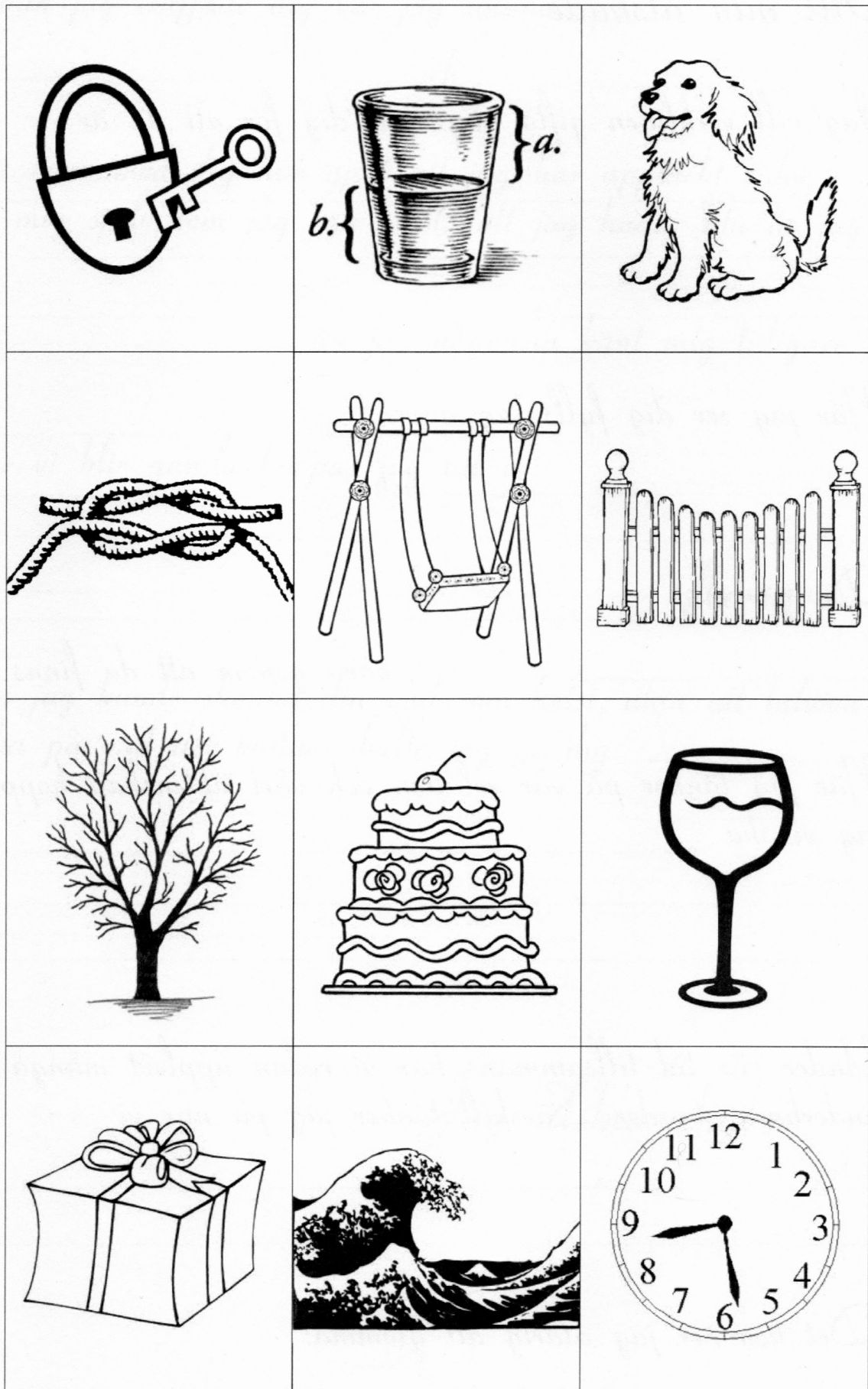
- Children are a gift – not something that we ourselves decide on taking on*
- I'm not sure if I can be a good parent, it's a huge responsibility*
- I dream about a large family*
- I worry whether we can afford children or not*
- We'll become a "real" family when we have children*
- I both want to work and to have children*
- I already long for children*
- I want us to wait a few years before we have children*
- I hope that my children and our mutual children will get along*
- It is important for my parents to have grandchildren*
- I am open to the idea that we adopt a child*
- A "real" man is a father and a "real" woman is a mother*
- All our friends already have children, it is due time for us now*
- With my job/position, it will be difficult to raise children*
- I feel it's irresponsible to have children given the state of the world*
- To me, children are not that important*
- It would be difficult if we don't have any children*
- I believe my partner thinks more about children than I do*
- I already have children from a previous relationship and that is enough*

When you have filled in the forms, exchange sheets and see to what extent your answers may differ. Talk to each other about the questions where you have given different answers. Are those issues important or unimportant to you? Is it as important to both of you or more important for one of you?











*To my beloved*

*I really want to marry you because you are*

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*The sight of you fills my heart with*

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\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

*You make me \_\_\_\_\_*  
*\_\_\_\_\_ just by being there.*

*When I think about our relationship and our marriage,*  
*I hope that we will \_\_\_\_\_*

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*During our time together we have already had many wonderful experiences. I fondly remember when we \_\_\_\_\_*

*That, I will never forget!*

# *To my beloved*

*Before I met you I was sometimes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_*

*Being with you has made me discover things about myself that I  
was not aware of before. Now I am more \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ than ever before.*

*When we grow old I hope that we \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ together.*

*If I could give you anything, no matter the price, I would give  
you \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_*

*I love you!*

**WHEN I THINK ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AND MARRIAGE, THIS IS WHAT COMES TO MY MIND**

Draw a circle around the five words that first comes to your mind!

*Life-long*

*Faithfulness*

*Voluntariness*

*God*

*Children*

*Contraceptives*

*Sex*

*Fellowship*

*Relationships*

*Divorces*

*The Holy Family of Nazareth*

*Security*

*Growth*

*Inseparable*

*Forgiveness*

*Sacrament*

*Family and relatives*

*Old-fashioned*

## Questions to see how well you know each other

1. My favourite dish is: \_\_\_\_\_

1. My spouse's favourite dish is: \_\_\_\_\_

2. My favourite garment is: \_\_\_\_\_

2. My spouse's favourite garment (for himself/herself) is: \_\_\_\_\_

3. This is where I would like to spend my vacation:

- A seaside resort*
- A major city in Europe*
- Trailer/camping*
- A cottage*
- The high mountains*

3. This is where I believe my spouse would like to spend his/her vacation:

- A seaside resort*
- A major city in Europe*
- Trailer/camping*
- A cottage*
- The high mountains*

4. This is how I would like to celebrate my birthday:

- Dinner in a restaurant*
- Party at home*
- Dinner at home, just the two of us*
- Cinema/DVD at home*
- I do not wish to celebrate*

4. This is how my spouse would like to celebrate his/her birthday:

- Dinner in a restaurant*
- Party at home*
- Dinner at home, just the two of us*
- Cinema/DVD at home*
- He/she does not wish to celebrate*

5. If you go out to rent a DVD, what will it most likely be:

- Thriller*
- Horror*
- Drama*
- Comedy*
- Tearjerkers*

5. If your spouse goes out to rent a DVD, what will it most likely be:

- Thriller*
- Horror*
- Drama*
- Comedy*
- Tearjerkers*

6. A good TV evening should include:

- A comedy series*
- A newscast*
- A movie*
- A docusoap*
- No broadcasting at all, I prefer to turn off the TV set*

6. And if your spouse owns the remote, this is what the evening will include:

- A comedy series*
- A newscast*
- A movie*
- A docusoap*
- No broadcasting at all, he/she prefers to turn off the TV set*

7. Pets – nice or a nuisance?

- A dog would be nice*
- A cat would be nice*
- A rodent or bird would be nice*
- I am allergic*
- I do not want to own a pet, there is too much obligation*

7. Pets – nice or a nuisance, according to your spouse?

- A dog would be nice*
- A cat would be nice*
- A rodent or bird would be nice*
- He/she is allergic*
- He/she does not want to own a pet, there is too much obligation*

8. If you play some music at home, what would it be:

- My favourite artist/band*
- Chart hit stations on the radio/internet*
- Folk music*
- Classical music*
- Popular/ESC*
- Our home should be silent*

8. If your spouse plays some music at home, what would it be?

- His/her favourite artist/band*
- Chart hit stations on the radio/internet*
- Folk music*
- Classical music*
- Popular/ESC*
- Our home should be silent*

9. Saturday mornings are great for:

- Visits to IKEA*
- Workout*
- Keeping busy with housework or gardenwork*
- Shopping*
- Hobby activities*

9. And your spouse prefers to spend his/her Saturday mornings this way:

- Visits to IKEA*
- Workout*
- Keeping busy with housework or gardenwork*
- Shopping*
- Hobby activities*

10. Sundays and other work-free days I like to:

- Visit family/relatives/friends*
- Spend time in nature*
- Go to a coffeeshop/restaurant*
- Visit a museum/exhibition*
- Sports/exercise*
- Stay home and relax*
- Visit church*

10. Sundays and other work-free days my spouse likes to:

- Visit family/relatives/friends*
- Spend time in nature*
- Go to a coffeeshop/restaurant*
- Visit a museum/exhibition*
- Sports/exercise*
- Stay home and relax*
- Visit church*

11. You and your spouse are at a restaurant. The food is no good. What do you do?

- I call the waiter and ask for another dish*
- I finish the meal, but ask for a price reduction*
- I say nothing, but leave no tip and am sure never to visit again*

11. You and your spouse are at a restaurant. The food is no good.

What would you like your spouse to do?

- He/she should call the waiter and ask for another dish*
- He/she should finish the meal, but ask for a price reduction*
- He/she should say nothing, but leave no tip and be sure never to visit again*

12. If it was entirely up to you, you would prefer that you lived:

- In an apartment in the middle of a city*
- In an apartment in the suburbs*
- In a house outside of a city*
- In a house in the countryside*

12. If it was entirely up to your spouse, you would live:

- In an apartment in the middle of a city*
- In an apartment in the suburbs*
- In a house outside of a city*
- In a house in the countryside*

When you have filled in the forms, exchange sheets and see to what extent your answers may differ. Talk to each other about the questions where you have given different answers. Are those issues important or unimportant to you? Is it as important to both of you or more important for one of you?

## HOW DO I ACT IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS?

Put a cross in the "correct" square.

Do not discuss the choices with your partner until you are finished.

What do I do to relax?

- Meet people or call someone?*
- Keep busy with housework or spend time in nature?*

What gives me new energy?

- A vivid conversation?*
- A moment on my own?*

When I'm about to learn something new, I want to:

- Listen to a lecture or instruction?*
- Read and study by myself?*

When I am about to make an important decision, I usually

- Trust my gut feeling, it usually turns out for the best?*
- Think through all options thoroughly and make lists?*

How do I like to do things?

- Spontaneously, upon the first thought?*
- In a planned order?*

When I have experienced something difficult or sad, I want

- ...my partner to ask me how I feel*
- ...to be alone for a while*



## TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

Things to think about:

*Examine:* Ask questions to make sure you really understand the other person's meaning and intention. Ask in such a manner that the answer requires more than just a "Yes" or "No". Rather say: Can you explain further? What do you mean?

*Empathy:* Stay sensitive to the other person's emotions, listen to what is tacit and unspoken, and try to imagine yourself in the other person's place.

*Consciousness:* Remember that we often distort what we hear – try to really listen to what the other person is saying, not what you think he/she is saying or what you want to hear. Do not disagree or argue and let him/her finish.

*Give feedback:* Be attentive and present, maintain eye contact and do not only focus on your own next rejoinder.

*Summarize:* When the other person has finished, sum up in your own words what you have heard. The other party can then find out whether you have understood or not.

## TO BE A GOOD TALKER

Things to think about:

*Love:* Remind yourself that you love your partner and that he/she loves you.

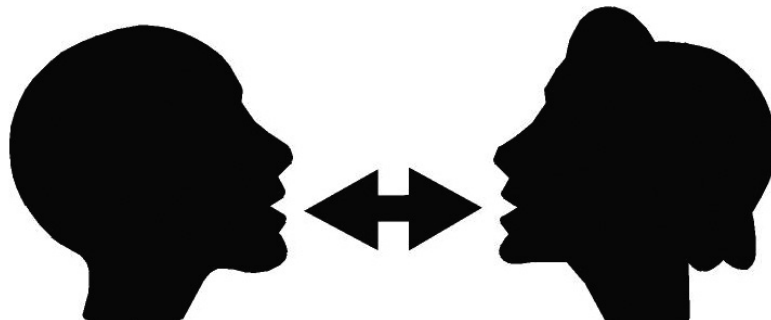
*Intention:* Thoroughly think through what you want to say before you start talking.

*Attention:* Tell your partner what you need from him/her. "I want you to listen to me for a moment, there's something I want to say..."

*Clarity:* Talk in short, comprehensible sentences. Your partner cannot read your thoughts. You must express what you mean if you want to understand.

*Solidarity:* Do not put blame on the other person. Rather, explain in what way you want the situation to change. Don't say: It's your turn to stay home when the kids are sick, you should take your responsibility... Rather say: I want us to agree on how we should handle the situation when the children are sick.

*How you say something, not just what you say:* We don't communicate through spoken words only. Just as important is your tone of voice, gestures and body language. The main part of human communication is wordless.



## On the view of marriage in Sweden - *Two worlds that cannot be reconciled?*

The headline above is the title of a book published some years ago. In interviews conducted by academic researcher and Catholic Minna Salminen Karlsson<sup>1</sup>, twenty young practicing Catholics talked – among other things – about their views on sexuality and cohabitation, and their understanding of the Church's teachings on these issues. The book title and the headline above is a quotation from one of these interviews.

When you prepare a couple for marriage, it is your duty to help them to reconcile these worlds – on the one hand, everyday life with its ideas and suppositions of the outside world; on the other hand, the Church and their faith – and create the unity on which a lifelong fellowship can be built. The text below describes how "common" Swedish young adults usually think about marriage and family.<sup>2</sup>

This is how the society surrounding the couple regards marriage and family:

Young adults in today's Sweden have a very positive attitude towards unmarried cohabitation, also after having children. This is evident from a survey conducted in 1999 with 2.300 young adults participating. The vast majority, 86% of men and 89% of women, found cohabiting acceptable even when having children. 77% of those already married also agreed. Thus, the social acceptance of unmarried parents is compact. Asked whether they are likely to marry within the next five years, four out of five of those living with a partner answer "yes" or "maybe".

What are the benefits of young adults today getting married? One of the attitude questions in the survey concerned arguments for or against marriage. Very few believed that they should marry for the sake of the children or for financial reasons. About two-thirds of those surveyed rejected such reasons for getting married. The important point seems to be to send out a signal to others that a relationship is serious: nearly 50% fully agreed to this statement. Another reason to marry is that it is regarded as safer to be married. Many agree with the statement "If you are married, it is more difficult to break up from a bad relationship": Statistics also show that couples who live together without being married have a greater tendency to leave each other than married couples. Studies show that many couples choose to marry in connection with the first or possibly the second child's birth.

Almost all relationships in today's Sweden begin with unmarried cohabitation. It is a well-established pattern. It is also common for at least the first child to be born before the parents get married: nearly two-thirds of all first-born children have unmarried parents. However, most people get married sooner or later – a lifelong unmarried cohabitation is rather uncommon. Neither do the results indicate that marriage is becoming outdated - on the contrary. The vast majority of young adults in today's Sweden expect to get married in the future.

In 2008, more than 47.000 children experienced the separation of their parents. That is approx. 30% of all children with married or cohabiting parents. The reduction of separations has mainly occurred in cohabiting families, but the risk of a child experiencing a separation is still twice as high for children with cohabiting parents than for children with married parents. (Statistics from Statistics Sweden).

In 2008, 285 couples got married in the Catholic Church in Sweden. Throughout Sweden, in 2008, 50.000 couples got married and about 21.000 couples separated.

So much for secular statistics. It may not be news to anyone that this is how it looks. You do not marry because you are "obliged" or for financial reasons. You wish to demonstrate that you are serious about your relationship. You want a "safe" relationship, a relationship that will last also through difficulties. From other sources, we know that most couples want to have one or more children together.

1) Salminen-Karlsson, Minna: *Det är ju två världar som inte går ihop* ('Those two worlds cannot be reconciled'), Gidlunds 2005

2) Statistics from *Välfärdsbulletinen* 4/2001, published by SCB

## Some reasons why marriage is a good idea

Statistics should always be taken with a pinch of salt, and there can be many explanations for a certain outcome. Sociological research concerns the general and not the individual. Many other things besides marriage decide how life will turn out for a human being. Not all marriages are happy and the majority of children of divorced parents have a good life.

However, with other factors such as income, class background and education taken into account, it turns out that:

- Married fathers have a better relationship with their children. Many children lose contact or have less contact with their father after the divorce.<sup>1</sup>
- Living as cohabitants is not as beneficial in terms of income and health as being married. Cohabiting couples break out of relationships more often than married couples do.
- Divorce in the family increases the risk that the children will themselves divorce or live as unmarried.
- Married men earn more than unmarried men with a similar occupation and educational background. The reasons for this are unknown.
- Children in married families perform better in school than children of single or cohabiting parents. Particularly important is the father's involvement in school work.
- Children who have grown up with a single parent experience poorer health as adults than those who have grown up with married parents.
- Married men and women consume less tobacco, alcohol and drugs than unmarried or cohabiting people.
- Married people live longer than unmarried or divorced. Particularly clear is the difference in life expectancy between unmarried/divorced men and married men.
- Children with divorced parents have more psychological problems than children whose parents are married. But it is even worse for children to live with parents in constant conflict than to experience their parents' divorce.
- Suicide is more common among unmarried and divorced. This especially applies to men.
- Married mothers are less likely to suffer from depression than unmarried or cohabiting mothers.
- Most juvenile offenders have grown up without their biological father.
- Domestic violence is more common among cohabiting couples than among married couples.
- Children living with married parents are less likely to be subjected to sexual abuse. The most common perpetrator is a stepfather or boyfriend of the mother.

1) Source of all information is the booklet *21 Reasons why Marriage Matters*, published by the National Marriage Coalition Australia/New Zealand. The statistics are taken from several different countries, including Sweden. The booklet can be downloaded at <http://www.nzmarriage.org.nz/>

Here, you can make notes of your agreements with the priest/deacon regarding the wedding ceremony.

|                                   |           |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| The wedding between               |           |           |
| The groom's first and family name |           |           |
| The bride's first and family name |           |           |
| Date                              | Time      |           |
| Location                          |           |           |
| Number of guests (approx.)        |           |           |
| 1 Introduction                    |           |           |
| Entrance procession               |           |           |
| Music/song                        |           |           |
| Words of welcome                  |           |           |
| Collect prayer, no                |           |           |
| 2 Liturgy of the Word             |           |           |
| First reading                     | Lector    |           |
| Responsorial psalm                |           |           |
| Gospel                            |           |           |
| Sermon                            |           |           |
| 3 Marital vows                    |           |           |
| Introduction                      |           |           |
| Music/song                        |           |           |
| The nuptial blessing, no          |           |           |
| The couple's prayer               |           |           |
| 4 Intercessions                   |           |           |
| Responses                         | Lector    |           |
| 5 Completion                      |           |           |
| Final blessing no                 |           |           |
| Recessional music/song            |           |           |
| Signing of the marriage form      | Witness 1 | Witness 2 |
| Other requirements                |           |           |

## Wedding customs and traditions

*The bride's father leads the bride to the altar and hands her to the bridegroom.*

According to Catholic faith, spouses give the sacrament to each other. It is not the father who gives away his daughter to a new family, but the bride and groom who choose one another. This is also in accordance with Swedish tradition.

*When the bride and groom exit the church, everyone should throw rice at them.*

It is a myth that uncooked rice is harmful to small birds. However, it is true that it is difficult to sweep it up. If your guests are eager to throw something (outside the church!), choose bird seeds instead. But first check with the church to make sure it is OK.

*After the wedding, the bride should leave the bridal bouquet by the statue of Mary in the church.*

This is a beautiful folk tradition, which is not part of the ritual, but which you can easily practice if you want to. But if you do, leave it after – and not during – the wedding ritual.

*The bride should wear a white dress and a veil.*

You do as you wish. The color white is a traditional symbol of virginity, but today all brides who wish may wear a white dress and veil. Remember that a wedding is a service of divine worship. Bring a scarf if the bride wants to wear a dress with bare shoulders. Feel free to tell guests to do the same!

*The bride's relatives are seated on one side of the church and the groom's on the other.*

This is not an obligation, but it is customary that the bride's family and friends are seated to the left of the church (the traditional Mary side/female side), seen from the church entrance towards the altar. The groom's relatives are seated on the right side. The bride enters and exits on the left side, closest to her family and friends.

## General guidelines for the form "Marriage notification"

The Bishop Office's form "Marriage notification" has been prepared in accordance with *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983). If the wedding officiant lacks delegation from the Swedish civil authorities to solemnize marriages, the couple must be married civilly before the church wedding takes place.

The following documents must be available when filling out the form:

*Hindersprövningsintyg* (Certificate of exclusion of impediments) which can be obtained at the local tax office. The certificate must not be more than four (4) months old on the day of the wedding. After the wedding the certificate, signed by the priest, is sent by the parish office to the tax authorities for civil registration.

The Catholic party needs:

- *Status liber* (freedom to marry), issued no more than six (6) months before the wedding, by the parish where he or she was baptised (or was received into full communion with the Catholic Church). This certificate shows that the person is free to marry, and it also indicates the date and place of confirmation.
- *Personbild* (Certificate of registration from the civil population register. NB not "personbevis"!), issued by the Swedish Tax Agency. This states clearly if you are or have been married and if you have any children. This certificate corresponds to the Church document *Status liber*.

The non-Catholic party needs:

- *Registerutdrag ur församlingsregistret* (A certificate of registration from the parish register): if you are a member of the Swedish Lutheran Church, this can be obtained from the parish where you were baptised. If you do not belong to the Swedish Lutheran Church you must request the certificate from the city archives, where church records are kept nowadays. The certificate shall state the date and place of baptism, and if possible the name of the minister who administered baptism. If you are not baptised you need permission from the Roman Catholic bishop to marry a Catholic.
- *Personbild* (Certificate of registration from the civil population register. NB not "personbevis"!), issued by the Swedish Tax Agency. This states clearly if you are or have been married and if you have any children. This certificate corresponds to the Church document *Status liber*.

Notes to the form

PAGE 1

1. Marriages are to be celebrated in a parish where either of the contracting parties has a domicile, quasi-domicile, or month long residence or, if it concerns transients, in the parish where they actually reside. With the permission of the proper ordinary or proper pastor, marriages can be celebrated elsewhere. (CIC 1115).

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2. The current denomination shall be indicated. If someone has left the Catholic Church through a formal act of defection, this must be stated. (Former denomination/church affiliation).
3. When a previous marriage has been dissolved through death, a death certificate is required. If, for any reason, this cannot be obtained, the issue must be submitted to the Bishop's Office.

4. When a previous marriage has been declared invalid due to *defectus formae*, this must be confirmed by the Bishop's Office (see separate form). Both parties' baptismal certificates must be attached. These certificates must be up-to-date and supplemented with the Certificate of exclusion of impediments (*hindersprövningsintyg*) and divorce decrees.
5. When a previous marriage has been declared invalid by an ecclesiastical tribunal, the decree or certificate must be presented to the Bishop's Office, in order to determine if the decree includes a marriage prohibition, and to receive *nihil obstat*.

If what is stated under notes 4-6 is not applicable, the Officialate must be contacted where appropriate. Otherwise, it is not possible to enter into a new valid marriage.

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#### 6. SPECIFIC DIRIMENT IMPEDIMENTS (*Impedimenta dirimentia*. Cf CIC §§1083, 1094)

Some of these questions are of confidential nature and shall be answered individually by each part.

- Minimum age (18 years as per Swedish law)
- Impotence
- The bond of a prior marriage
- Marriage with a non baptized person
- Sacred orders
- Public perpetual vow of chastity in a religious institute
- Abduction/detention
- Homicide of previous spouse
- Direct line of consanguinity/affinity
- Legal relationship arising from adoption

If any of these impediments to marriage are at hand, any dispensation must be requested from the Bishop's Office.

#### 7. SUBJECTS TO CONDITIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE (Cf. CIC §1102)

Only conditions relating to present or past conditions are allowed. A marriage subject to a condition about the future cannot be contracted validly. The bishop's written permission is always needed to establish conditions for the marriage.

8. The question for BII:1, page 4, also applies to marriage between two Catholics.
9. The questions for BII:2, page 4, are especially important when one of the parties is not Catholic. To clarify the religious duties, the Catholic party may also be questioned. The questions for BII: 2 shall be omitted if the question of children no longer is relevant. However, the obligation applies to adoptive children.
10. If there is any doubt regarding the will to marry, the Bishop's Office should be contacted.

Marriage permit, Dispensation, Nihil obstat

11. IMPEDIMENTS TO ASSIST AT MARRIAGE  
(CIC 1071, § 1)

Except in a case of necessity, a person is not to assist without the permission of the local ordinary at:

- a marriage of transients
- a marriage which cannot be recognized or celebrated according to the norm of civil law
- a marriage of a person who is bound by natural obligations toward another party or children arising from a previous union
- a marriage of a person who has notoriously rejected the Catholic faith
- a marriage of a person who is under a censure
- a marriage of a minor child without a special permit from the County Administrative Board where the minor is registered
- a marriage to be entered into through a proxy

If any of the impediments above is at hand, you must apply for permission from the Bishop's Office.

12. According to CIC 1124, a "mixed marriage" exists when one party belongs to the Catholic Church and the other party is baptized and belongs to a non-Catholic community. However, it is not a question of mixed marriage in the event that the Catholic party has withdrawn from the Church through a formal act of defection (*actus formalis defectionis*).

13. A church wedding between a Catholic and an unbaptized person should normally take place during a Ministry of the Word. If mass is desired, you need to request permission from the Bishop's Office.

14. In principle, the Catholic form is required for interfaith marriages. However, there are the following exceptions (CIC 1127):

- Marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic party of an Eastern rite must be entered into according to Catholic marriage form to be allowed. However, for the validity of marriage, it is only required that a sacred minister has participated. In such a mixed marriage or in marriage between a Catholic of Latin Rite and a Catholic of an Oriental/Eastern Church Rite, contact the Catholic Diocese. Only a priest (not a deacon) can perform such a wedding.
- In order for the marriage to be valid, it must be entered into under some public form of celebration (civil or other church community)
- So-called "ecumenical or double marriage" is prohibited. Likewise, there is not to be a religious celebration in which the Catholic who is assisting and a non-Catholic minister together, using their own rites, ask for the consent of the parties. For a marriage to be valid, it is necessary that the Catholic priest accepts the couple's marriage vows.



15. *Nihil obstat* must be obtained from the Bishop's Office in the following cases:

- Marriage of persons divorced due to a canonically invalid marriage (cf. note 6)
- Lack of required documents (e.g. death certificate, baptismal certificate)
- If there is a conditional marriage or when there is doubts concerning *status liber* (see also note 18)
- Marriage with Eastern Catholic/Oriental Catholic

16. In the following cases, the Bishop's Office must be contacted:

- When there is doubt about the will to marriage of either party
- When a non-Catholic party was not present during the marriage preparation talks
- When a dispensation from the Catholic Canonical Marriage Form is required
- In marriages between a Catholic and an Orthodox/Eastern Church Christian
- When other difficulties are at hand

If one of the parties is not baptized or illegally baptized, there is a marriage impediment - *cultus disparitas*. Dispensations may only be given by the bishop, where applicable.

17. *Status liber* is usually established for Catholics through the form Status Liber (DH 114) (not older than six months). In cases where this certificate cannot be obtained, the person concerned may take baptism oaths and confirm that there are no impediments to the marriage being validly contracted. The same opportunity exists for baptized non-Catholics. When in doubt, contact the Catholic Diocese (to obtain *nihil obstat*).

18. In civil or non-Catholic marriages, the priest who has conducted the marriage preparation talks must request a marriage certificate from the bride and groom. He is also obliged to announce this. The marriage is registered in the Wedding Book of the Catholic party's wedding parish. All documents must also be stored there. If a marriage certificate cannot be obtained, at least the date for the dispensation from the Canonical Form must be stated in the Baptismal Book of the Catholic party.

19. After a wedding ceremony with any dispensation from the Canonical Form, the Bishop's Office must be notified.

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20. The section concerning delegation (CIC 1111) and permission to marriage outside the proper parish (CIC 1115) shall be completed by the parish priest.

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21. All documents relating to a marriage shall be stored in the parish where the marriage was celebrated.

Valid for the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm  
+ Anders Arborelius Bishop of Stockholm



This is a guide to prepare couples for a Catholic wedding. The booklet includes discussion points and outlines for three meetings with the couple. There are also information sheets to hand out, materials to prepare the wedding ceremony together with the couple, and various worksheets that can be filled in jointly. The folder also contains suggestions for a Mass of Thanksgiving to celebrate wedding anniversaries. The guide is related to the informational booklet *We're getting married*.