Session 11. Be Fruitful

Movement IV. The Body

Passages: Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3-5; Psalm 128:3-4; 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Luke 1:24-25

Part 1. Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. That the group surveys how Scripture actually speaks about children, and can then state the Church's teaching on openness to life as a single argument about the meaning of one act rather than as a list of prohibitions.

Catholic Touchstone. The unitive and the procreative meanings of the marital act are inseparably connected by God himself, and man may not break that connection on his own initiative. The Church's teaching on contraception and on reproductive technology is organized around that one claim, together with the dignity of the child and of embryonic human life developed in Donum Vitae and Dignitas Personae (Humanae Vitae 12; CCC 2366-2370).

What You Need to Know

This is the session your couples expect to be a lecture. If it becomes one, you lose them. Teach it as a single argument, made carefully, that they are free to examine.

Two disciplines will make or break the night. First, teach the actual argument rather than a list of forbidden things. Second, refuse weak evidence even when it is convenient.

DO NOT BUILD THE ARGUMENT ON GENESIS 38

The story of Onan is frequently deployed as the biblical proof text against contraception, and you should not use it that way. The text ties the judgment to his refusal of the levirate duty owed to his dead brother, and it says so explicitly. Serious readers disagree about how much weight the passage can carry on the separate question, and a room of intelligent adults will notice if you lean on a text that will not hold.

Say this out loud in the session. It teaches the room something about how to argue, and it makes everything else you say more credible. The Church's case does not need that passage.

THE ACTUAL ARGUMENT, IN FOUR STEPS

- **One.** The marital act has two meanings that belong to it by its nature: it unites the spouses, and it is the kind of act by which new life comes to be. Neither meaning is added by intention; both are in the act.
- **Two.** The Church teaches that these two meanings are inseparably connected, and that this connection is not one that human beings may break on their own initiative (Humanae Vitae 12; CCC 2366).
- **Three.** Contraception acts against the procreative meaning while keeping the unitive one. In the language of Session 10, it makes the body say I give you everything while a part is deliberately withheld.
- **Four.** Reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization break the same connection from the other side, producing life apart from the act that unites the spouses. Same principle, opposite direction (Donum Vitae; CCC 2376-2377).

Notice how much this simplifies the evening. There is one teaching, not two, and a couple who understands the principle can work out the applications themselves.

THE DISTINCTION COUPLES MOST OFTEN REJECT

They will say that a couple using natural family planning to avoid a pregnancy intends exactly what a contracepting couple intends, and that the Church is distinguishing between methods rather than between acts.

The answer is that intention and act are different things and the moral life turns on both. A couple abstaining is not performing an act and stripping it of a meaning; they are not performing the act. A couple contracepting is performing the act while acting against something the act means.

The analogy that works best in this study, because the room has already built it, comes from Session 8. There is a difference between declining to make a promise and making the promise while privately intending not to keep it. The outcome may be the same. The two are not the same act, and everyone knows it.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING, DESCRIBED HONESTLY

Natural family planning is not the rhythm method, and it is not Catholic contraception. Modern methods, including sympto-thermal, Creighton, Billings, and Marquette approaches, read observable biological markers to identify the fertile window. They require instruction from a trained teacher, they require both spouses to participate, and effectiveness varies substantially by method and by how carefully a couple uses it. Do not quote a percentage from memory; direct them to a certified instructor who can give real numbers for the method they choose.

The Church teaches that spouses may, for just reasons, space births (CCC 2368; Humanae Vitae 10, 16). She deliberately does not publish a list of qualifying reasons. That latitude is genuine and you should present it as such: the couple discerns before God, with generosity, taking into account their physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions.

Two honest notes to your couples. Learning a method takes months, not days, so it belongs on their calendar now rather than in the week before the wedding. And couples regularly report that the required conversation about whether they have serious reasons is itself the most valuable part.

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Give this its own space rather than a footnote, because a significant share of couples will need it.

- The Church strongly supports treating infertility. Diagnosing and correcting the underlying cause is medicine and is encouraged.
- Techniques that assist the marital act to achieve its end are morally acceptable. Techniques that replace the marital act are not (CCC 2377).
- In vitro fertilization is judged illicit because it separates procreation from the conjugal act, ordinarily involves the creation of more embryos than will be transferred, and thereby involves the loss or indefinite freezing of human embryos, and because it introduces a technician into the origin of a person's life. Third party gametes and surrogacy raise further objections (Donum Vitae; Dignitas Personae).
- Say the necessary thing clearly: a child conceived through IVF is a human person of full and equal dignity, loved by God, and no judgment whatsoever attaches to that child. Somebody in your room may have been conceived this way or may have a niece or nephew who was.

AND WHEN THE CHILD DOES NOT COME

Do not let this session end on technology. The Catechism says that spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, and speaks of the fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice (CCC 1654, 2379).

Session 13 handles the grief of infertility properly. Tonight, name it, do not resolve it, and make sure any couple already carrying that fear knows it is coming.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Genesis 1:28. The blessing, and the first command addressed to human beings.
- Psalm 127:3-5 and Psalm 128:3-4. Children as a heritage from the Lord and a reward.
- 1 Samuel 1:1-20. Hannah, and the sorrow of childlessness taken seriously by Scripture rather than explained away.
- Luke 1:24-25. Elizabeth speaks of her reproach among men being taken away, which tells you what barrenness cost a woman socially.
- Genesis 38 is where Onan appears. Note carefully that the text ties the judgment to his refusal of the levirate duty. Do not build the contraception argument on it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. PAUL VI ON THE CONNECTION THAT MAY NOT BE BROKEN

In Humanae Vitae, St. Paul VI taught that there is an inseparable connection, established by God and which man may not break on his own initiative, between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the marital act.

That sentence is the foundation of the teaching. Much of what the Church has said since about contraception and about reproductive technology applies it, alongside her teaching on the dignity of the child and of embryonic human life.

Humanae Vitae, section 12.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

St. Gianna Beretta Molla was an Italian pediatrician, married with children, who in 1962 faced a serious medical condition during pregnancy and chose the course of treatment that preserved the life of her unborn child. She died shortly after giving birth, and was canonized in 2004 with her husband present.

Two things are worth saying carefully. Her decision was extraordinary and the Church has never taught that a mother is obliged to make it. And she was not a martyr to a rule; she was a working physician and a wife who loved her marriage, which is why she is a fitting patron for a room of engaged couples.

Historical summary. Canonized in 2004; her husband attended the canonization.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON THE CHILD AS GIFT

Teaching on reproductive technology, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that a child is not owed to anyone as a right and may not be treated as an object of ownership, but is a gift, and that the child has the right to be conceived within the marital act of his own parents.

That framing is the reason the Church's objection to certain technologies is not a suspicion of medicine. It is a claim about how a person ought to come into existence.

Summary of the teaching of Donum Vitae (1987), developed in Dignitas Personae (2008). Note for the leader: doctrinal instructions,

not the voice of a canonized saint.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 2366 states the inseparable connection between the two meanings of the conjugal act, citing Humanae Vitae.

CCC 2368 teaches that for just reasons spouses may wish to space the births of their children, and that they must verify that their desire does not arise from selfishness. Note that the Church declines to publish a list of qualifying reasons.

CCC 2370 distinguishes periodic continence, which respects the bodies of the spouses, from actions that render procreation impossible, and states that the latter are intrinsically evil. Quote this paragraph precisely rather than paraphrasing it, because loose paraphrases produce both false rigor and false laxity.

CCC 2373-2375 speaks warmly of couples who suffer infertility and supports research aimed at reducing human sterility.

CCC 2376-2377 treats reproductive technologies, distinguishing techniques that assist the conjugal act from those that replace it.

CCC 1654 and 2379 address spouses to whom God has not granted children.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

They Have No Wine returns in its second form. Session 10 was where self control runs out. Tonight is where plans run out: the couple who cannot conceive, the couple who conceive far sooner than intended, the couple who discover the method is harder than the class implied. Name it out loud.

One Flesh underlies the whole argument tonight: the two meanings belong to one act because the act is the one flesh union itself.

Watch for the couple who go quiet during the infertility material. Some couples already know something. Follow up privately, and make sure they know Session 13 exists.

IF A COUPLE IS IN AN IRREGULAR SITUATION (LEADER ONLY)

A couple already contracepting, or a bride already on a prescription. Do not ask, and do not create a situation in which anyone must disclose. Note in passing, to the room, that hormonal medication is sometimes prescribed for genuine medical reasons unrelated to contraception, that this is a matter for a doctor and a confessor, and move on.

A couple where one has been sterilized. This happens, including in second marriages. It does not prevent a valid marriage, and the pastoral questions around it belong to the priest. If it surfaces, be matter of fact and route it.

A couple who have already experienced infertility or pregnancy loss. Tonight can be very painful for them. Say early in the session that Scripture takes the sorrow of childlessness seriously, and point to Hannah before you point to any teaching. Follow up privately.

A couple who reject the teaching outright. They exist and they are not enemies. Do not extract agreement. Ask them to hold the argument rather than the conclusion, tell them plainly that the Church asks a hearing

rather than an instant assent, and encourage them to raise it with the priest. A couple who leaves understanding the argument and disagreeing is a better outcome than a couple who leaves pretending.

A couple facing a genetic risk or a serious medical situation. This needs a doctor and a priest, not a study leader. Say so and help them make the appointment.

Session Goals

1. The group surveys how Scripture speaks about children and about childlessness before any teaching is presented.
2. Every participant can state the Church's teaching as one principle rather than as a list of prohibitions.
3. Every participant can explain the difference between abstaining from an act and acting against a meaning of the act.
4. Natural family planning is described accurately, including that instruction takes months and that effectiveness varies by method and use.
5. The teaching on reproductive technology is presented without any implication about the dignity of children conceived through it.
6. Every couple leaves with a concrete next step: finding an instructor and booking a course.

Time Note and Pre-Chosen Cuts

Ninety-minute plan. Opening prayer, 4 minutes. Win questions, 8. Live discovery moment, 14. Build questions 1 through 4, 22. The steelman, 20. Build questions 5 through 7, 16. Send and Live It, 4. Closing prayer, 2.

Seventy-five minute plan. Cut Build question 6 and the Dig Deeper box. Keep the discovery, the steelman, and the concrete next step.

Do not run long tonight. A session on this subject that overruns feels like pressure. End on time even if you have to drop a question.

Part 2. Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord, you are the author of life and you have never made a person you did not intend. Tonight we are talking about the most personal thing there is, and some of us are afraid, and some of us are already grieving. Give us open minds and honest hearts. Where we disagree, keep us listening. Where we long for something we do not have, be near. Amen.

Win. Getting Started

Open questions. No wrong answers, no answer box. Let every couple speak once before anyone speaks twice.

A. How many children did you grow up assuming you would have, and where did that number come from?

B. What is the best thing about the family you came from? Not the most impressive. The best.

Build. Into the Text

LIVE DISCOVERY MOMENT

Start with Scripture before any teaching, and do not tell them what they will find.

The instruction: find as many places as you can where the Bible describes children, or describes not being able to have them. Twelve minutes, in pairs. Write down what the text actually says, not what you expect it to say.

What they will find: Genesis 1:28, the blessing and the first command addressed to human beings. Psalm 127:3-5, a heritage from the Lord and a reward. Psalm 128:3-4. Genesis 33:5, the children God has graciously given. Ruth 4:13. And then the other side: 1 Samuel 1, where Hannah weeps and will not eat; Genesis 30:1, where Rachel says give me children or I shall die; Luke 1:25, where Elizabeth speaks of her reproach being taken away.

Then ask two questions. First: is there anywhere Scripture treats a child as a burden or an interruption? Second: does Scripture minimize the grief of not having them? Take answers.

They will notice that the passages they surveyed are unembarrassed on both sides. Children are repeatedly presented as gift, and childlessness as a real sorrow that nobody is told to get over.

1. Genesis 1:28 is the first command addressed to human beings. What is it, and what does it come attached to?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Be fruitful and multiply. And it comes attached to a blessing: God blessed them, and God said to them.

That order matters. Fruitfulness is presented as part of the blessing, not as a duty imposed on top of it.

Ask the room whether they have ever heard children described primarily as a cost. Most of them have, constantly, and it is worth naming how unusual the biblical framing sounds now.

2. Think back to Session 10. If the marital act says something, what does it say about children?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It says: I am open to what comes of this. That is part of the sentence the body speaks, alongside the total and permanent and exclusive gift.

Which means the openness is not an add on that religious people attach to sex. It is one of the things the act already means.

The Church's language for this is that the unitive and procreative meanings are inseparably connected, and that this connection is not ours to break (Humanae Vitae 12; CCC 2366). Everything else tonight follows from that one sentence.

3. Given that principle, work out for yourselves why the Church says what she says about contraception, and then why she says what she says about in vitro fertilization.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let them do it. Most rooms get there.

Contraception performs the act while acting against one of its meanings. In the language of Session 10, the body says I give you everything while something is deliberately withheld.

In vitro fertilization breaks the same connection from the other direction: it produces life apart from the act that unites the spouses, and in practice ordinarily involves creating more embryos than will be transferred, with the loss or indefinite freezing of the rest.

One principle, two directions. If your group sees that, tonight has worked.

Say the necessary sentence out loud: a child conceived by IVF is a person of full and equal dignity and no judgment attaches to that child, ever.

BUILD THEN PRESS: THIS TEACHING IS UNLIVABLE, AND THE DISTINCTION IT RESTS ON IS A DISTINCTION WITHOUT A DIFFERENCE

Build it at full strength.

Build it at full strength. Most of the Catholics in your room privately hold some version of it, and a great many have never heard it stated honestly by someone who then answered it.

Two objections, and they reinforce each other. First, the distinction fails. A couple using natural family planning to avoid a child and a couple using contraception to avoid a child want exactly the same outcome, plan for it with the same deliberation, and act on the same knowledge of biology. Calling one openness to life and the other a refusal of it looks like a distinction drawn by method rather than by morality, and methods are not what makes an act good.

Second, the history is uncomfortable. Paul VI convened a commission to study the question, its majority recommended that the teaching could change, and he decided otherwise. Since 1968 the teaching has been very widely disregarded by practicing Catholics, including devout ones, and the practical result has been widespread quiet dissent rather than assent. A teaching that the faithful cannot receive, issued against the advice of the body convened to examine it, looks less like the voice of the Spirit and more like an institution unable to move.

Then press.

Concede the real things first and do not hedge them. The commission existed. Its majority did favor change. Paul VI decided against that recommendation, and the encyclical was received with widespread dissent. Any presentation that hides this is not going to survive a curious person with a search engine, and the couples will be right to distrust everything else you said.

Press first on intention and act, because that is where the argument lives. Morality has never turned on intention alone. Two people can want the same outcome and do different things, and the difference between the things they do is exactly what moral evaluation is for. Use the analogy this study has already built: there is a difference between declining to make a promise and making the promise while intending not to keep it. The outcome can be identical. Nobody thinks the acts are.

Press second on what abstaining actually is. A couple practicing periodic continence is not performing the act and disabling part of it. They are not performing it. Whatever else can be said, the act they do perform still says the whole sentence.

Press third on the cost of the alternative. If the two meanings can be separated whenever a couple judges it prudent, the same logic applies from the other side, and there is then no principled objection to producing children in a laboratory, selecting among embryos, or contracting a third party to carry them. That is the principled implication of the argument rather than a claim about what any particular person will do next, and it is why the Church holds the two questions together.

Press fourth on the reception argument, carefully. Widespread non-reception is a serious pastoral fact and the Church has to reckon with it. It is not, by itself, an argument that a teaching is false, unless one is prepared to say the same about teachings on wealth, forgiveness of enemies, and honesty in business, which are disregarded at similar rates.

Do not overclaim. Do not tell them this is easy, do not tell them everyone who disagrees is a dissenter, and do not present Humanae Vitae as a defined dogma; it is authoritative moral teaching that the Church presents as belonging to her constant tradition, and theologians have discussed its precise note. Say that the Church asks them to examine the argument seriously, and to talk with a priest, rather than demanding instant agreement tonight.

4. The Church says spouses may space births for just reasons but does not publish a list of what counts. Why not, and what does that ask of a couple?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because the judgment depends on circumstances only the couple and God know: their health, their means, their state, the needs of the children they already have (CCC 2368; Humanae Vitae 10, 16).

What it asks is genuine discernment rather than either presumption or scrupulosity. The Church asks them to be generous and to examine whether the reason is real. She does not ask them to submit a form.

This is one of the places in Catholic moral teaching where the latitude is real, and you should say so plainly rather than inventing a stricter rule than the Church has given.

5. What do you actually know about natural family planning, and what have you heard about it?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Correct the common errors. It is not the rhythm method, which was calendar based. Modern methods read

observable biological signs to identify the fertile window.

It ordinarily calls for instruction from a trained teacher, participation by both spouses, and consistent daily observation. Effectiveness varies substantially by method and by how carefully it is used, so do not quote a number; send them to a certified instructor who can give real figures for the method they choose.

Two practical notes. Learning takes months, so it belongs on the calendar now. And the conversation it forces, about whether they have serious reasons this month, is the part couples most often say changed their marriage.

DIG DEEPER: WHY NOT GENESIS 38?

Onan is regularly produced as the biblical proof against contraception, and this study does not use him. The text ties the judgment to his refusal of the duty owed to his dead brother, and says so directly.

That does not settle every question about the passage, and serious readers differ. But an argument should be built on its strongest ground, and the strongest ground here is the meaning of the act, not a disputed reading of a difficult chapter.

Tell your couples why you are declining to use it. Learning to refuse a convenient bad argument is worth more to them than one more proof text.

COUPLE CONVERSATION (JUST THE TWO OF YOU, NOT THE ROOM)

Just the two of you.

How many children have each of us been quietly assuming? Say the number out loud. If they differ, do not resolve it tonight.

Have we ever actually said to each other what we intend to do about all of this, in plain words? If not, say it now.

Who is booking the natural family planning course, and by when?

6. What does the Church say to a couple who want children and cannot have them?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That their marriage is not diminished, that their conjugal life keeps its meaning and value, and that fruitfulness can take the form of charity, hospitality, and sacrifice (CCC 1654, 2379).

And that treating infertility is good medicine which the Church actively encourages, including research aimed at reducing sterility (CCC 2375). The Church encourages diagnosis, treatment, and research that respect human dignity; the objection is to techniques that replace the marital act rather than assist it.

Do not tie this off neatly. Say that Session 13 takes up the grief itself, and mean it.

Send. Carrying It Out

Open questions again. No answer boxes.

Y. What is one thing about children you now believe that you did not believe three hours ago?

Z. What would it look like for your home to be fruitful in ways that have nothing to do with how many children you have?

Live It This Week

- **Book the course.** Find a certified natural family planning instructor this week and register. Not research it. Register.
- **Say your number.** Tell each other how many children you have quietly been assuming, and how strongly you hold it.
- **Read Humanae Vitae 12 and CCC 2366 to 2370, together, once.** It is short. Read the actual text rather than commentary about it.
- **Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before next session.**

Closing Prayer

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, you are the giver of life and every person who has ever existed was your idea first. Make us generous. Take away our fear of what we cannot control. For the couples here who will conceive easily, give them gratitude; for those who will not, give them your presence and our friendship. Teach us to receive children the way you gave them, as a gift and not a project.

St. Gianna, pray for us. St. Anne and St. Joachim, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Psalm 127:3

Part 3. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

- Genesis 1:28. The blessing and the first command.
- Psalm 127:3-5 and Psalm 128:3-4. Children as heritage and reward.
- 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Genesis 30:1; Luke 1:24-25. The sorrow of childlessness, taken seriously.
- Genesis 33:5; Ruth 4:13. Found by the group in the discovery moment.
- Genesis 38. Noted and deliberately not used as the basis of the argument.
- Humanae Vitae 10, 12, 16. The core teaching.
- Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4. Assigned reading before Session 12.

Catechism Paragraphs Used

CCC 1654, 2366, 2368, 2370, 2373-2375, 2376-2377, 2379.

Before Next Session

Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before Session 12.