

TRUE MARRIAGE LOVE

Truly conjugal love with its delights comes only from the Lord
and is given to those who live according to His commandments.
(Conjugal Love 534)

The teachings of the New Church help us understand the spiritual aspect of marriage. Ideally, it is a spiritual joining of a man and a woman that affects their souls as well as their minds and hearts as the Lord is able to give them true marriage love. In the New Church, this is called “conjugal love.” This genuine love can only be given to people who follow the Lord, obeying His commandments. What of those who do not marry here on earth? One of the precious teachings of the New Church is that the Lord will provide happy marriages for all good people—if not here on earth, then in heaven. Throughout our lives, the Lord is leading and preparing us for a happy, eternal marriage.

READ: “Treasuring Marriage” by the Rt. Rev. Brian Keith

FAMILY WORSHIP: The Pearl of Great Price

Read the two parables in Matthew 13:44-46. One compares the kingdom of heaven to treasure hidden in a field. The second compares heaven to a merchant seeking beautiful pearls. When he finds one pearl of great price, he sells all that he has and buys the pearl.

Discussion Ideas:

1. How are the teachings about conjugal love like hidden treasure?
2. Truths from the Word are like pearls, and the Lord has given us many pearls of wisdom about conjugal love. Can you think of what some of these pearls might be?
 - Conjugal love is a gift from the Lord.
 - Marriage is eternal, continuing after death.
 - In the eyes of the Lord, a husband and wife are equal and interdependent, each contributing something unique to their relationship.
 - Looking to the Lord and loving the neighbor helps conjoin a husband and wife.
3. There is another teaching in Matthew that warns us not to “cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet...” (Matthew 7:6). These teachings are very precious and we need to protect them in our own minds and in how we share them with others.
4. Consider giving daughters a pearl pendant as a reminder of the teachings about conjugal love.

ACTIVITY: Honoring Marriage (for ages 4-8)

Have children make a picture of a married couple within a golden ring or circle.

PROJECT: A Unique Friendship Bracelet (for ages 11-16)

Marriage is a covenant of the Lord, husband, and wife. To illustrate this concept, make braided friendship bracelets using gold embroidery thread to represent the Lord, red embroidery thread for the wife, and white embroidery thread for the husband.

SING: O Precious Sign

ACTIVITY: Can You Learn About Marriage from Today’s Culture? (for ages 12 and up)

Does our culture let us glimpse true marriage love? If we could learn about marriage only from the world around us, what hope would there be for building a marriage that would last to eternity?

YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

Only those people know the blissful delights of conjugal love
who reject the horrible delights of adultery.

(*Conjugal Love* 137:7)

The sixth commandment prohibits adultery. It means that we should not do anything that harms marriage such as telling dirty jokes, looking at pornography, using obscene language, entertaining filthy thoughts, behaving promiscuously, or having sexual relations outside of marriage. Parents and teachers can help children learn to obey this commandment by teaching them about the beauty and importance of marriage love and how important it is to avoid anything that degrades marriage.

READ: “You Shall Not Commit Adultery” by the Rev. Michael Gladish

Provides a gentle introduction to the subject of adultery.

READ: “Love Truly Conjugal” by the Rev. Andrew M. T. Dibb

FOR FAMILY DISCUSSION: Turning Toward Heaven or Hell

The Word tells us that when we do something that honors marriage, we turn toward heaven, but when we do something that harms marriage, we turn away. This is because conjugal love and adultery are opposites. Conjugal love is identified with heaven and adultery with hell. The one is loving and unselfish while the other is selfish and hateful.

Our actions and thoughts regarding the opposite sex, our spouse, marriage, *etc.* all have a role in supporting marriage or hurting marriage. **Note:** We are not responsible for the thoughts that pop into our heads, but we are held responsible for thoughts that we invite back into our minds and dwell on. If we make a mistake and are truly sorry, we can ask the Lord to help us change our ways so that we can come back into order and work toward the ideal of true marriage love. The Lord is merciful and forgiving. But we will save ourselves and others much sadness if we avoid making mistakes in the first place.

FOR PARENTS: Protecting the Idea of Marriage for Our Children

How can parents protect the innocence of their children and help teenagers keep a pure idea of marriage? Consider trying the following:

- Help your children learn about conjugal love by reading them books such as *Love of Loves*, taking them to weddings, celebrating wedding anniversaries, *etc.*
- Try to minimize the influence of the media on your children’s perception of marriage and sexual relationships. Monitor what your children are watching on television, and if you encounter a program that is offensive, consider turning it off or discussing the false ideas it presents. Before watching a movie, it can be helpful to read reviews available on the Internet. Note: The hells are adept at using what we read or see to put bad thoughts in our minds.
- Protect your children and teenagers when they are using the Internet. Install filtering software, but remember that it isn’t 100% effective. Monitor what your children are doing on the Internet. (A suggestion is to keep computers with Internet access in public areas.)
- Encourage group activities rather than pairing off at an early age. Provide chaperonage. Give children rules and consequences that will make it easier for them to make good decisions in life.
- Make sure you have family time. Take opportunities to impart values to your kids. Attend church together, have family worship, eat meals together, and enjoy a peaceful bedtime routine.
- Show your children that you are committed to marriage.

CHALLENGES IN MARRIAGE

After marriage, the states of life in married partners change and progress according to the bonds formed between their minds by conjugal love. In each partner, man and wife, the changes of state and progressions of state after marriage depend on the kind of conjugal love they have....
(*Conjugal Love* 191)

In fairy tales we read of a hero and heroine getting married and living “happily ever-after.” If we have the misconception that we will live happily ever after following marriage, we will be unprepared for the effort it takes to build a good marriage. Since conjugal love grows as we turn to the Lord and work on our own regeneration or spiritual rebirth in adulthood, we work toward conjugal love throughout our lives. But there is a “fairy tale ending” of a “happily ever-after” marriage (in heaven if not on earth) for everyone who believes in the Lord and obeys His commandments.

READ: “The Face and Clothing of Love” by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

Genuine love of marriage is seen in friendship, which is described as the face and clothing of conjugal love. To be a good spouse is to be a genuine friend. It is friendship which helps a couple make the transition from the romance of the early days of marriage to the everyday challenges of joining two lives into one. Friendship plays an especially critical role in marriage at times when there are significant problems. The hells try to convince us that we no longer love our spouse. But if we can force ourselves to act in a friendly way, the Lord will be able to help us work through the difficulties. As we strive to become friends, something unique and precious is growing inside.

FOR REFLECTION: Greater Love

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). In his sermon, “The Face and Clothing of Love,” the Rt. Rev. Keith points out that these words have application in friendships—within and outside of marriage. For to be a genuine friend to another involves being willing to give up our selfish life for the greater good of our friendship. Focusing on the good in a friend or spouse, while also trying to give up our own selfishness, is a good way to build genuine friendship.

- Reflect on the good you see in your spouse, or if you aren’t married, think about a good friend. You might want to write these down and look at them from time to time.
- Now reflect on ways you may have been acting selfishly in the relationship. How could you “lay down” some of this selfish life?
- We are told that it is “the nature of love to confer joys upon another whom it loves from the heart” (*Conjugal Love* 180). What could you do that would bring joy to another?

PROJECT: The Friendship Heart (*teens and up*)

This project encourages us to think about the role of friendship and trust in opening the hearts of marriage partners (see *Conjugal Love* 162). You may want to color the couple inside the heart.

READ: “A Genuine Faith in Marriage” by the Rev. Grant Schnarr

The pathway to conjugal love in marriage involves looking to the Lord for enlightenment by reading His Word and applying it to our lives. We must be willing to work together in marriage and use the truths of the Word to serve others.

PICTURING CONJUGIAL LOVE AND ITS OPPOSITE

The chaste delights of conjugal love in heaven are represented by gardens and fields of flowers, aromas of fruits and fragrances of flowers, and animals such as lambs, young goats, doves, and birds of paradise.
(*Conjugal Love* 430)

The Lord gives us teachings in His Word to help us envision the beauty of conjugal love. We are told that the angels see beautiful skies, fields of flowers, and gentle animals such as lambs and doves to help them picture conjugal love. Here are several projects that can help us picture conjugal love and its opposite—the love of adultery.

PROJECT: A Conjugal Love Mural

Make a mural picturing the various ways that conjugal love (or the delights of conjugal love) are pictured in heaven. You may want to include: beautiful rainbows, golden rain, fields of flowers, lambs, young goats, and doves.

PROJECT: The Golden House

Turn a box into a golden house and fill it with treasure (see *Conjugal Love* 443).

PROJECT: Look Up to Heaven

Make a picture showing one of the beautiful skies in heaven that remind people of conjugal love as described in *De Conjugio* 1.

PROJECT: Picturing the Love of Marriage (ages 11 and up)

In heaven, the love of marriage is pictured by a woman of indescribable beauty—a virgin—who is surrounded by a shining cloud (see *AC* 2735; *HH* 382; *AE* 986:2; *SE* 4175). In contrast, the love of adultery is pictured by an old, deformed woman; the sight of her chills the beholder (see *AE* 986:2). Make two posters, one picturing the love of marriage and one picturing the love of adultery. Leave space around the women or beneath them to attach little cards with ideas or quotes from the Word that tell us about these opposing loves.

TREASURING MARRIAGE

“I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
and you shall know the Lord.”
(Hosea 2:20)

In his sermon on **Marriage and True Morality**, the Rev. Geoffrey S. Childs explains that this poetry in Hosea speaks of the Lord as the source of conjugal love and how this love helps a husband and wife find the Lord. Passages such as this can help us remember the potential of conjugal love to bind a husband and wife together, uniting their souls, their minds, and their hearts. It can help us obey the sixth commandment prohibiting adultery, which means to turn away from whatever hurts marriage. And as we turn from what is harmful, the Lord will be able to give us a love that is holy and pure—a love that will bless our lives forever.