

CHAPTER 3 – ASSIGNMENTS

Part 2: IN GOOD TIMES AND IN BAD

ASSIGNMENTS FOR § 90–93

WHEN FACING CHALLENGES

Do as a couple

- a. In your opinion, what are ‘bad times’? How much experience do the two of you have in coping with difficulties?
- b. Think back on challenges you have experienced, which later turned out to have positive consequences or effects. What caused the negative aspects to be turned into something positive?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR § 94–95

CONFLICT TRIGGERS AND STRATEGIES FOR COPING SUCCESSFULLY

Do as a couple

Below, we have listed some common triggers for conflict in marriage. Reflect on the various situations and discuss how the two of you can work together to deal with them in a constructive way.

- **Difficulties in communication**

Good communication between spouses is vital. Do the two of you understand each other well enough? Are there areas you should work on more?

- **Gender roles and division of labour – Everyday living**

How can the two of you equally apportion work and responsibilities and at the same time utilize each other’s strengths in the best possible way? Most of life consists of ordinary days. What will you do in order to live these well and meaningfully? How can you contribute happiness to each other and renew the routine?

- **Sex life**

Sex life can be complicated by differences in expectations, reactions, health and hormone levels. Both spouses need to gain knowledge about the woman’s and the man’s sexuality – be open and show each other the greatest respect. Consideration and tenderness are catchwords. See your doctor if you suspect health-related difficulties. Good help is available!

- **Jealousy and the fear of unfaithfulness**

Establish a ‘joint policy’ for strengthening the bonds between you and for avoiding the temptation to be unfaithful. Be quick to cut off relationships that can create difficulties for either of you. Which situations should you avoid? Which initiatives can you implement to strengthen mutual trust and to avoid destructive jealousy?

- **Fatigue and adjustment of routines during pregnancy and childbirth**

To bring a child into the world is fascinating but demanding. Pregnancy can be easy or

complicated, and the mother will need opportunities to rest. When a child is born, family routines will change radically. This involves much joy but also much work and lack of sleep. The two of you need to work closely together on childcare and on opportunities for sleep. How much help can you count on from family and friends? How will the two of you distribute the period of parental leave?

- **Childrearing**

Which main goals do the two of you think are most important in childrearing? Which values are most important for you to convey to the children? The parents' vocation: to be a visible sign of God's love! How can you fulfil this vocation in different situations?

- **Relationship with in-laws**

In your relationship with each other's families, respect and tolerance are catchwords. At the same time, you leave your parents to start a new family. The bonds to one's spouse and any children that may be born will henceforth take precedence over the bonds to parents and siblings. How can the two of you find a healthy balance in these relationships?

- **Finances**

Get a good overview of earning capacity, capital and expected spending. Together, set up specific budgets annually and keep an accurate record of running expenses. It may be a good idea to agree on a fixed sum which each of you can have as 'pocket money'.

- **The use of time and resources on education and work**

Both spouses' work habits and job requirements/commitments must now be coordinated in a shared everyday life. Together, plan how much time and energy you think it is right to spend on studies or work. How can you, in practice, give first priority to each other and your children?

- **Moving or building a house**

The sale and purchase of a house, moving, renovating and building are all demanding projects. What do your housing plans look like? What can you manage of practical and financial obligations in this area? How can the demand or craving for a certain material standard conflict with your need to spend time with and care for each other and the children? What do you rank as most important in life? How do you deal with this?

- **Hobbies and the use of leisure time**

Make an agreement with each other on how much time you will use on mutual and separate leisure activities – exercise, hobbies, friends, etc.

- **Different circadian rhythms**

Having different circadian rhythms (body clocks) can be difficult to manage if one or both spouses do not actively try to find a compromise. Come to agreement on what is okay of sleeping in and staying up late.

- **Long-term illness or death in the immediate family and different ways of grieving**

Support the affected spouse as much as possible. Build a network of persons who can help you take breaks or get respite when needed. Men and women often grieve in different ways. Be generous, responsive and sensitive to differences in how you grieve over the loss of loved ones. Clarify with each other how much you can use of time and energy on helping close family members: *prioritize your marriage* – find extra time to be together and do things you enjoy.

- **Violence and the misuse of drugs**

Violence amongst close family members is more common than we tend to think. Violence in marriage is a complete rejection of the love which the spouses have promised each other. No one benefits from remaining in such a situation, especially if the couple have children. Seek help if you feel threatened or are being mistreated/abused by your sweetheart/spouse – from a doctor, the Familievernkontor (the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs – Bufdir), a crisis centre or the police.

Help each other to practise moderation in alcohol consumption. Come to agreement on what the two of you accept regarding partying – and stick to the agreement. How can you let your spouse know if his/her alcohol consumption becomes difficult to relate to? If one of the spouses shows signs of misuse (of alcohol, drugs, pills), it is often necessary to seek professional help.

- a. Select three of the points in the list of conflict triggers which you think are important to do something about before you get married. Together, set up an action plan in order to deal effectively with these challenges.
- b. Which of your strong sides, as individuals and as a couple, will be useful in the different scenarios? Which coping strategies can you start using already now?
- c. Compare the challenges with Jesus' words to the apostles on the night he was betrayed: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me' (John 14: 1).
- d. Do we agree that we will work actively on our relationship, especially when we see signs that the spark is fading or the level of conflicts is increasing? What can we do specifically?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR § 96–101

SOLVING PROBLEMS TOGETHER

Do as a couple

Having a firm and predictable plan for discussing and resolving the challenges and problems you face is a good way to make conversations on difficult themes less dangerous and to lessen tensions between yourselves (based on the method in Markman et al., 2010):

- What is the problem about, what does it consist of?
- Present and listen to each other's point of view. When conversing, alternate between talking and listening and give each other equal time to talk.
- Hold a solution-oriented brainstorming session that allows you to find out what will best serve you as a couple/family.
- Make an implementation plan for the things you agree on, and designate tasks and responsibilities.
- Agree on a time for one or more follow-up conversations in which you review what the two of you have done and evaluate how the solutions have worked.

Choose a somewhat challenging theme and use the suggested problem-solving method to find a solution. Or discuss the following scenario: One of you has been offered a very well-paid job in another country. The other spouse does not want to move. What do you do?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR § 102–104

PERSONAL WEAKNESSES AND PATHS TO RECONCILIATION

Work on as a couple

This can be a difficult assignment. Treat each other with great respect and care.

Think through the following individually:

a. Are there aspects of my personality that I think could create difficulties for our relationship? Are there aspects of my partner's personality that I think could create difficulties for our relationship?

Share with each other what you have identified in a gentle and respectful way. *Are there situations about which you should seek professional help to master? Feel free to contact a priest or the course leader regarding where you can get professional help.*

b. Each of you, tell the other what you yourself will do about your own weaknesses in order to avoid friction. Find ways in which you can achieve reconciliation after a disagreement.

c. Ask for forgiveness for the wrong which each of you may have done against the other during the time before your marriage. 'I am sad that I...' Try to forgive each other in a warm and encouraging way.

ASSIGNMENT FOR §105–107

PRESERVING HOPE

Group discussion

Read the text below. Share your thoughts with each other.

ALL SHALL BE WELL

Because of the Lord's tender love for all who want to be saved, he is quick to comfort them and say: 'The reason for all this pain is sin. All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.' These words were said in such a friendly way, without a hint of reproach against me or anyone else who wants to be saved. How very unjust it would then be for me to upbraid God that he allows my sin, as long as he does not upbraid me for falling into it.

In these words, I saw God's deep and high mystery, which he wants to show us in heaven. Then we will understand why he allowed sin. And when we know this, we will have infinite joy in God.

The saints that be in Heaven, they will to know nothing but that which our Lord willeth to shew them: and also their charity and their desire is ruled after the will of our Lord: and thus ought we to will, like to them.

Based on excerpts of Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (1373) (see below).

Do as a couple

Write down different 'places' or resources where you can find hope and encouragement in times of difficulty.

PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENTS

- Read the Passion together; start by reading John 11: 55–20: 10. Alternate between reading to each other. What makes the strongest impression on you?

This is the most central part of the whole Gospel, and non-Catholics should also be familiar with it. Read also CCC, 606–623.

- Train yourselves to apologize, ask for forgiveness and forgive one another. Begin with small and unimportant things – when you spill something on the table, unintentionally bump into each other, forget to clean up after yourselves. Then it will be less difficult to ask for forgiveness the day you have done something really stupid!
- Do each other at least one service every day from now until the next course night, preferably something that requires you to overcome one of your own inclinations. Afterwards, if you want, tell the group how you experienced it.

SUGGESTED READING

- Pope John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 1984.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 606–623.
<https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>
- H.J. Markman, S.M. Stanley, S.L. Blumberg, *Fighting for Your Marriage* (3rd edition), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
- Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (1373), London: Penguin Classics.
- Robert Llewelyn (ed). *Enfolded in Love: Daily Readings with Julian of Norwich*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004.

RESOURCES

- Modum Bad, www.modum-bad.no/
- Kildehuset kurs- og kompetansesenter – www.kildehuset.no