



**COUPLE
MENTOR**
JOURNEY



PRAYER OF SPOUSES AND PARENTS

TO THE STS LOUIS AND ZELLIE,
PARENTS OF ST THERESE OF LISIEUX



Saints Louis and Zelle Martin,
today we turn to you in prayer.

By fulfilling the duties of your state in life
and practising the evangelical virtues
as spouses and as parents,
you have modelled for us
an exemplary Christian life.

May the example of your unwavering trust in God
and your constant willingness
to surrender all the joys, the trials,
the sorrows and the sufferings
that filled your life encourage us to persevere
in our daily challenges and
to remain in joy and Christian hope.

Amen.

BEING THE VISIBLE SIGN OF LOVE FOR OTHERS

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Like a baton, faith is passed down from generation to generation. Imagine a Church where experienced couples share the joys and struggles of married life with engaged and newly married couples, inspiring them to stay connected with the vibrant sacramental life of the parish.

“The initial years of marriage are a vital yet delicate period, during which couples grow in an awareness of their vocation and mission.

Consequently, this period calls for pastoral guidance which continues after the celebration of the Sacrament.

The parish is the place where experienced couples may be made available to the younger ones, possibly in conjunction with associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.”

- The Final Report of the 2015 Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis

WHY THE COUPLE MENTOR JOURNEY [CMJ]?

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We are all aware that the first five years of marriage are critical and sadly, many marriages fail within these fledgling years. In the recently Synod on the Family, much was said about the 'art of accompaniment' needed to support young couples in their initial years.

For this reason, the Archdiocesan Commission for the Family (ACF) hopes to form couple mentors in every parish, who are willing to journey with young couples and support them with their own stories and experience.

The two dimensions of the CMJ

The Couple Mentor Journey (CMJ) has two dimensions. The first being **journeying** with an engaged couple and supporting them where they have questions and difficulties by providing the Church's perspective and teachings along the way as issues arise. The emphasis is on accompaniment and sharing of life experiences of the more mature couple mentor. The second dimension is the **faith formation of couples** with emphasis on the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage as a sacrament. The programme focuses on the journey together – between the engaged couple and the couple mentor.

Proper preparation before receiving any sacrament is crucial. CMJ is a time when the couple would be able to dedicate more time to prepare for the sacrament of matrimony by learning from the 'lived' experience of couple mentors.

Furthermore, CMJ builds a network of couple mentors and reinforces the work of evangelisation in the parish community.

Current marriage preparation and CMJ:

Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE) and the Marriage Preparation Course (MPC) give the engaged couples an insight into living out the sacrament through faith sharing by the presenting couples.

CMJ provides engaged couples with:

- a stronger base for their marriage with continuous 'live' marriage preparation;
- the opportunity to form relationships with their couple mentor; and
- a connection to the faith life of the parish community.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAMME USED IN THE JOURNEY?

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SmartLoving Engaged is a parish-based, marriage formation programme that integrates contemporary relationship psychology with Catholic theology.

It offers an effective and powerful experience for the engaged couple. This program appeals to interfaith couples as Catholic doctrines are taught in an approachable, gentle but firm manner. It adopts the theology of the faith to live out the marriage. Originated in Australia, it has been used for more than 10 years, and is now adopted in UK and East Malaysia (Kuching).

It is a six-session, home-based course presented to one engaged couple (or a few) by a couple mentor. Using a DVD to present 20 minutes of content in each session, the role of the couple mentor is to flash out the content with their personal examples and journey with the engaged couple. The course is designed to be interactive, with simple exercises and questions for the engaged couple to stimulate discussion and further exploration of the topic.

PROGRAMME KEYPOINTS



SESSION TOPICS

These sessions are fully guided, progressing sequentially in the following manner:



A Mission To Love

This session introduces the concept of SmartLoving – a practical insight designed to make more efficient a couple's efforts to love, by helping them learn the specific ways in which their partner experiences love. The role of affirmation is also addressed.



Dialogue: Being One

Using the L.I.F.E. communication framework, couples will learn how to communicate effectively and intimately. A technique for accomplishing emotional communion (empathy) is also taught.



Knowing Me, Knowing You

A detailed examination of the couple's attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and marriage, looking particularly at their family of origin. The impact of other significant relationships, including emotional injuries, is addressed.



Building Unity

Couples learn how to use the Stop-Reflect-Connect tool for value-based decision-making. Conflict and the role of forgiveness are examined, including an adaptation for the Stop-Reflect-Connect tool for the specific purpose of reconciliation.



Sex: Sacred Embrace

Examines how, contrary to popular belief, marital sex is an intimate communication rather than just a recreational activity. The concept of sex as a sacramental gesture and a renewal of wedding vows are explored.



'A Total Gift of Self'

Provided as a home-based activity via the Smartloving Member Hub ('live' events) or as an extra session (online), this topic explores fertility and the natural methods of regulation.

**Extension topic done at home.*



Soul Mates for Life

Addresses the sacramentality of marriage that will direct couples towards spiritual intimacy with their partner. Specific issues relating to couples of mixed faith(s) are addressed along with an introduction to couple prayer.

THE CMJ?



The CMJ will be recommended as necessary and **couples are encouraged to take this journey within one year after their initial marriage preparation.** This is regardless of when their wedding may be.



The engaged couple will first hear of the CMJ from the priests marrying them, apart from the need to go for either CEE or MPC. During their CEE or MPC experience, the engaged couple will be given details of the CMJ and encouraged to participate in the journey.



They will sign up on the ACF website, giving only their names, the parish they will belong to after marriage and email contact.



The couple mentor coordinator of the parish will liaise with the engaged couple to match them with a couple mentor. A more detailed form will be filled by the engaged couple (to be kept by the parish). Thereafter, they will begin their six sessions with their couple mentor.

- One full course has six sessions, and each session lasts for about an hour.
- No professional presenting skills is required; you present the course to one couple at a time (or to a few at one go if you so choose).
- A 15-20 minute DVD will present the core content of each session, so you can focus on your own relevant experience to support the content.
- Flexible schedule: you can easily reschedule a session if it clashes with another engagement.
- Flexible format: You decide how many courses to run a year; and decide how many couples per course (one-to-one is the ideal, but if you are comfortable with a group of couples, go for it).



Thereafter, they will begin their six sessions with their couple mentor.

THE CMJ PATH



Adam and Eve love each other and are ready for marriage.



There is much to prepare on the way to their wedding. But they have not forgotten about the most important aspect of marriage preparation: **continual faith guidance.**

Having 'graduated' from Catholic Engaged Encounter and the Marriage Preparation Course, Adam and Eve approach their priest, Fr Abraham, for advice, who recommends the **Couple Mentor Journey (CMJ)**. Adam and Eve soon sign up for the programme through the **ACF Website**.



catholicfamily.org.sg/cmj



Adam and Eve are introduced to their couple mentor Mr & Mrs Ong, who walk with them through six CMJ Sessions on the way to their wedding day.

- CMJ TOPICS**
- A Mission To Love
 - Dialogue: Being One
 - Knowing Me, Knowing You
 - Building Unity
 - Sex: Sacred Embrace
 - Soul Mates for Life
 - 'A Total Gift of Self'*

6+1 SESSIONS



Adam and Eve's journey with Mr & Mrs Ong doesn't end even after their wedding. The CMJ programme continues to guide the couple and integrate them into the **parish community**.



WHY BE A COUPLE MENTOR?



Each married couple is a visible sign of God's love for His people.

Whether you are both Catholics or an interfaith couple, consider being a couple mentor (and continue to enrich your own relationship)

None of us are perfect couples, yet we try our best to live out our vocation as faithful Christian spouses. You believe in this wonderful sacrament and want to help younger couples build a fulfilling marriage. You are married for at least five years.

As long as both of you have been married for at least five years, rooted in Christian love and committed to living out the Church's teachings on marriage – you are ideal candidates to be a couple mentor (and share your blessings!).

Big Picture

Our Archdiocese will be enriched as you become part of the network of couple mentors in your parish. Mentoring is one of the most effective ways to sustain your own marriage and keep it vibrant and healthy.

As a couple mentor, you will be exploring the programme's insights and applying them in your own marriage as you share from the wisdom of your experience.

Your sharing is of great value: The many challenges facing couples in this age make it vital that they be given the tools and support to be successful in marriage from the beginning. Your treasure trove of hindsight becomes their precious foresight.

This is in line with the recommendation brought up at the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the family: the Church needs couples with experience to guide those starting out.

CRITERIA AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUPLE MENTOR



Criteria

There is no perfect marriage here on earth, since none of us is perfect. But here are some qualities that Couple Mentors should strive towards:

- A strong conviction that marriage is a permanent and faithful commitment;
- A belief God and Church, the Body of Christ, are necessary to a successful relationship;
- Generous, warm and non-judgmental;
- Realistic and hopeful regarding the day-to-day living of marriage;
- An open mind that is willing to share your own lived witness of the Sacrament;
- An ability to listen well, reflect back and encourage participation without threatening;
- Can be witnesses and companions with journeying couples in their continued search for a fulfilling and successful marriage;
- Have been married for at least five years, are following the teachings of the Catholic Church;
- Endorse and support the teachings of the Church in being free, total, faithful and fruitful, etc.
- Understand the principle of confidentiality.

Responsibilities

- Schedule and conduct six sessions with journeying couples, following up with them to reschedule if they cannot make a session;
- Note down queries or areas where you are uncertain;
- Attend at least one formation or training session per year;
- After the initial six sessions, to journey with couples for a period of 20 months in an informal manner, through meet-ups, emails, text messaging, etc



HOW SESSIONS ARE RUN



Parishes can decide how they want to carry out CMJ. Although the charism of the CMJ is for one-to-one journeys, allowing Couple Mentors to build strong bonds and friendships with their journeying couple.

Here are some, non-exhaustive options that the CMJ can be run in:

1. Once a week over six weeks: the six-week nature of the course increases the impact of the course dramatically, allowing couples to practice the new tools in between sessions and consolidate what they have learnt;
2. Once bi-weekly, finishing the initial sex-session course in three months;
3. Three Saturday afternoons with two sessions on each Saturday;
4. Two days with three sessions each day
(this is not recommended, as each session can be too long for intense and deep sharing);
5. Four evenings over four weeks, ending with a one day course
(the last two sessions, NFP input, Mass and a meal together).

Engaging Journeying Couples

When running in groups, Couple Mentors can roam the room during the couple activity period to speak individually with each engaged couple. The Couple Mentor can split up to do this, and cover more ground.

Participation Pitfalls in a Group Setting

When journeying with more than one couple in a session, journeying couples tend not to participate as readily in discussions, especially if they do not know the other couples. This also means that a standard two-hour session is often shorter for groups. Some activities may also need to be adjusted slightly when run in a group.

Location of sessions

The course can be run in homes, which preserves the intimate nature, and particularly experience the Domestic Church. The Sacramental witness of the Couple Mentor is strongest in their home. Larger groups can be run in parish or school facilities.

Number of Journeying Couples

If a Couple Mentor is journeying with several Journeying Couples, they may choose to run small group sessions in the Couple Mentors' home, but meet with each couple separately for one of the sessions. It is possible to run the first two sessions in a group, then take two weeks to meet independently with each couple, before resuming the group sessions with the remaining three sessions.

COMMON QUESTIONS



When does an engaged couple attend the CMJ?

The CMJ is recommended as necessary to an engaged couple. Their participation in this journey does not hinge on their wedding. Instead, they are invited to take the journey (with a couple mentor) anytime within a year after their initial marriage preparation. Smartloving has advised that the journey is most successful when done over a shorter timeframe.

How long is a CMJ?

It is recommended for the six sessions to be completed within two to three months. Most couples will inevitably experience a scheduling clash at some point in the course. However, if extending the timeframe to at most six months is the only way they can attend, it is best to accommodate them.

What happens after completing the six sessions?

This is when the relationship between the young couple and the couple mentor becomes more 'mature'. Informal get-togethers or serving within the parish can enhance the young couple's marriage as they see the visibility of couple mentors living out their marriage sacrament. The young couple can also move on to participate in other enriching programmes.

Would CMJ count as marriage preparation as it seems requiring the engaged couple to attend either CEE or MPC and CMJ is too much to ask?

CEE and MPC are the current marriage preparation programmes in our Archdiocese. They lay the foundation for the couple. With the CMJ, the engaged couple is able to draw on a couple mentor for pastoral guidance and experience.

Can a couple attend CMJ before CEE or MPC?

Since CEE/MPC are the Archdiocese's marriage preparation courses, they have to be attended. The CMJ can be taken anytime within a year of completing this initial marriage preparation.

Can the CMJ be done in a group instead of one to one?

It can although the unique benefits arising from individual mentoring are forgone.

COMMON QUESTIONS



Where can we search for Couple Mentors in our parish?

We need to invite couples to be couple mentors personally.

Couples who attend daily mass, those who attend bible sessions or talks, couples who are not yet involved in the parish.

When are Couple Mentors ready to begin journeying with couples?

Couple Mentors only need to prepare two sharings per session. They do not need to have all sessions prepared in order to begin; they only need to remain one session ahead of their journeying couple. While it is perfectly normal to feel anxious when presenting for the first time, most couples find the course easy and enjoyable to do after the initial run.

A two-day course is sufficient to get couples up and running as Couple Mentors. This course will allow Couple Mentors to familiarise themselves with the course, experience the activities and even find inspiration for their personal sharings. More specific tips are also weaved into the course.

My spouse belongs to another faith. Can we make a good Couple Mentor?

Interfaith Couple Mentors have a special role because they are a witness that mixed marriages can be lived well too. For interfaith couples to facilitate the CMJ, the non-Catholic spouse is expected to be active in supporting the faith of their spouse, growing in their own faith/spirituality and prepared to understand and support the teachings of the Catholic Church as covered in the course.

It can be a challenge for couples who are contracepting or were already sexually active prior to marriage. But couples living a good marriage are not expected to have a perfect history or even be perfect in living perfectly every aspect of the teachings of the Church. They do, however, need to be open to growth, regretful of past mistakes, and on the journey towards full acceptance to the Church's view of marriage. It is good for Couple Mentors to be honest in sharing their story and be willing to acknowledge past mistakes, but Couple Mentors who promote alternative lifestyles that are in opposition to the teachings of the Church defeat the purpose of the CMJ. This is covered in the training course, and is also documented in the Couple Mentor guide with extensive notes in Session 5.

COMMON QUESTIONS



Will there be Continuous Formation for Couple Mentors?

Couple Mentors continue to be part of their parish. However, training and formation sessions will be done on the archdiocesan level:

Two sessions per year starting in 2017 will cover Church teachings on marriage and family life, on accompaniment, on questioning skills for meaningful conversations, among other topics. These sessions also provide a platform for Couple Mentors to raise questions or issues they encounter when mentoring. It is in this way that questions and challenges are shared with all Couple Mentors in the CMJ programme.

My Parish has not adopted the CMJ Programme. How can I be part of the CMJ?

While the ACF hopes that the benefits of the CMJ can reach every parish in Singapore, not every parish is able to adopt the programme for one reason or another. If you are interested in signing up for the CMJ, but belong to a parish that does not carry the programme, we will be happy to match you with a Couple Mentor at a nearby parish.

Likewise, Couple Mentors who wish to serve in this programme, but belong to a parish without CMJ, will be matched to journey with couples near their own parish. Up to 40% of Catholics do not go to their geographical parishes.



WHAT'S NEXT?



Dates to note	
Jan – Apr	Select a CMJ couple coordinator; Select 5-8 couple mentors*
Jun 25/26 (Full days)	Couple mentor training workshop by the creators of the SmartLoving programme, Byron and Francine Pirola from Australia.
Jul –Aug	Final touch-up of sessions by couple mentors and launch of programme on ACF website

After each EE/MPC session, participants will be encouraged to register for CMJ.

**Based on a targetted take-up rate of 50% from 30 marriages per year per parish (15 couples), five to eight couple mentors should be sufficient if each couple mentor journeys with two or three couples per year.*

Costs Involved

Couple mentor training on June 25/26 is fully subsidised by ACF (although a love offering will be requested to defray costs incurred from the training).

Materials: Each parish will receive up to six CMJ printed guides at no charge.
Engaged couples will register and pay about \$80 (TBC) for two participant workbooks.
The sessions with couple mentors are free.

For more information

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COMMENTS & FEEDBACK



Newly-weds Henry and Irma:

After we had done CEE, as we were preparing ourselves for marriage, many times we reminded ourselves of the need to prepare not just materially, but also spiritually. During those times, as thankful as we were of CEE, we felt that it would have been good to have a kind of follow-up guidance or support in this area from the Church. Now that we are newlyweds (with the understanding that couples need to be married for a couple of years before we can sign up for ME), time and again we would feel the same longing for spiritual guidance in order to live our marriage as a sacrament. Hence when we came to know about this CMJ initiative, we truly felt that this programme would bring a lot of good for us and other newly married couples out there.

Jeremy and Pearlyn:

We are a young couple, soon to be married. We want to live a life of commitment, strengthened by the richness of the sacraments with one another. In today's world, we see and hear of many who struggle with broken marriages and are determined to place God at the centre of our marriage. Reading the endless barrage of marriage tips and tricks on social media and in books is not sufficient for us – we hope to glimpse into how things are like after marriage, to hear about the all-too-real struggles of dying to ourselves and be inspired by those who have walked the same path. We are very excited about befriending our Couple Mentors as we feel they can guide us on our journey by sharing their own experiences. After Engaged Encounter, we were truly inspired by the stories of struggles and success in marriage. We know that there is an uphill task ahead in the beginnings of a marriage, and we desire to share our lives with others as we share theirs, and be challenged and encouraged by them.