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# INTRODUCTION

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## The Vision of Marriage

“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Across the eons of time, countless men and women have joined together in this most holy of bonds, one of the most important relationships we will ever have. So important that everyone from saint to sinner has something to say about it. And lots of what’s been said about this divine institution has been anything but divine! Descriptions of marriage have ranged from a wonderfully hot bath that grows cold the longer you sit in the tub, to an unusual war—one where you sleep with the enemy—to a train wreck waiting to happen. But even though everyone has something to say about marriage, there’s one thing that nearly all of us will agree on: Marriage is an adventure, one that uses all of your resources—and then some—to successfully blend the lives of two people into a single loving family.

The Lutheran Course on Marriage celebrates this divine institution. With a chance to relax and learn together, couples attending this course will discover new treasures in their relationships that will strengthen and enrich their lives. And what better way for couples to discover the treasures in their own marriages than with the tools of God’s word and the practical wisdom of Martin and Katie Luther.

## A Family Reunion

The Lutheran Course on Marriage works something like a family reunion, except no one needs to bring a camera, pose for pictures, or say, “Cheese.” Like a family reunion, there will be an arrival time, a gathering of the whole family, conversations in smaller groups, farewells, and the ride home.

### ***Table Talk***

Martin Luther shared a great deal of wisdom and practical advice in informal conversations over dinner, a tradition known as Table Talk. And in honor of that tradition, this course invites couples to come to the table to talk and learn.

As couples arrive for each session of the course (or at each meal, if this course is taking place during a retreat), they will be invited to enjoy a time of informal Table Talk. This portion of the session is very much like the exciting moments right after you arrive at a family reunion—when you eagerly catch up on the lives of your relatives, celebrating successes and enjoying each other's company. It's in that same spirit of love and sharing that couples in The Lutheran Course on Marriage will gather for each session, catching up with old friends, making some new friends, and sharing what's been going on in their lives.

### ***Large Group Stuff***

The session then shifts focus to hearing and learning with the entire large group. This is like that special time in a family reunion when children—no matter how old they are—settle back and listen to stories told to them by their aunts and uncles or grandparents. The time in a family gathering when one generation shares the treasures of their life experiences with the next. In The Lutheran Course on Marriage, this happens with a video of married couples and presenters sharing jewels of wisdom designed to enrich marriage relationships.

### ***Small Group Stuff***

Couples are then invited to move into small groups for more intimate and focused conversations. This part of the session looks like the fun interludes that happen during a family reunion when smaller groups of siblings or cousins run off to their favorite spots to talk. So in The Lutheran Course on Marriage, small groups of three or four couples meet in separate areas for more focused discussion on the session's topic.



*Couples will find themselves continuing their conversations on the drive home from each session.*

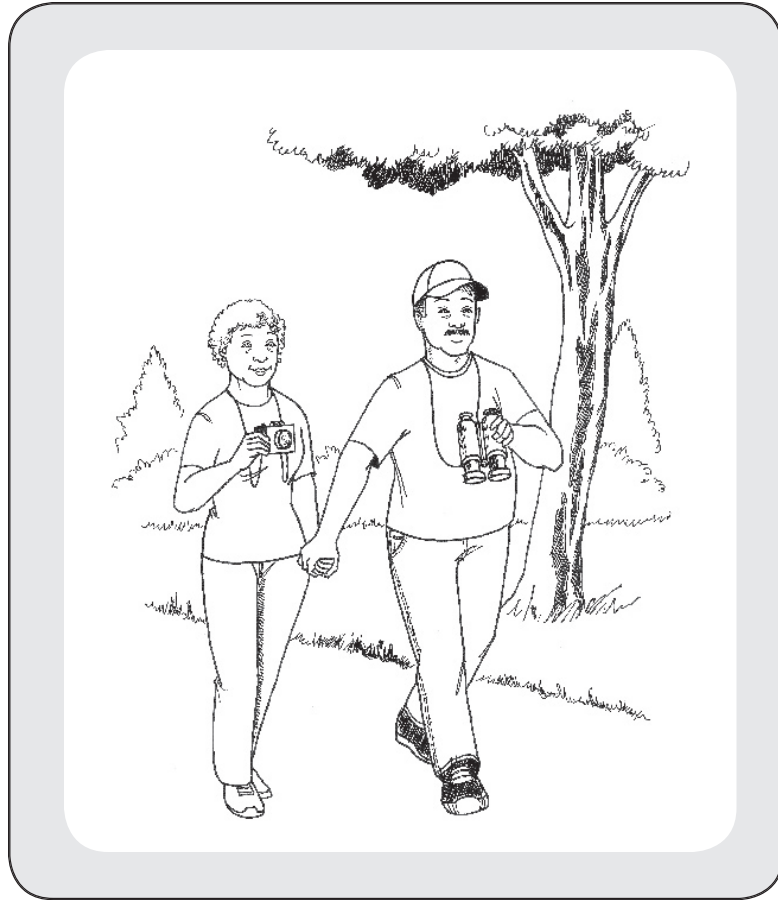
### ***Wrap-Up***

Next, the couples reconvene in the large group. This is much like the “good-byes” families say at the end of a reunion. In *The Lutheran Course on Marriage*, each session wraps up with a litany and blessing.

### ***At-Home Stuff***

But that’s not the end of the session, because couples will find themselves continuing their conversations on the drive home and into the following days, sharing things they’ve learned, discussing things they’re wrestling with, and even making decisions about things to change. To help guide these continuing conversations, couples will be sent home with questions and activities based on the session they just enjoyed. (If you are using a retreat format for the course, invite couples to try out some At-Home Stuff between sessions.) Couples are free to use these questions and activities as much as they want, whenever they want. At-Home Stuff is a list of suggestions to keep conversations going, not a list of requirements.

*Each couple will bring different gifts, challenges, and perspectives.*



## The Adventure Begins



Before you set out on this exciting adventure, it's a good idea to know what pitfalls to avoid. As in any adventure, there are dangers—occupational hazards, if you will—for the leaders of both the large group and the small group. The first and greatest is the temptation to have the definitive answer, the final word, or the great truth. While you do need to have answers to things like what the schedule looks like and who is in charge of certain tasks, you by no means need to know the answers to questions about marriage trends and research, or the current theological position on this divine institution. In fact, having definitive answers may actually be a detriment. That's because most adults learn best when they have a chance to think and talk and pray about questions that perplex them, and then come to answers that will work best for them.

And the answers that are just right for one couple may not be at all helpful to the husband and wife sitting next to them. That's because each couple coming to The Lutheran Course on Marriage will bring a different bounty to the table. There will be some couples who have blended their own unique characteristics into a finely-tuned relationship. And there will be others who are wading through the challenges of marriage and family life with one hand on the emergency button. And then there will be other couples who really fall somewhere between these two extremes—having some areas of married life figured out, but looking for some new tools that could help them better navigate the course ahead. And so, couples attending this course will take in information that best fits their own personal situations. They'll chew on it for a while, and then they'll prayerfully decide how to apply it to their own lives. As a leader, it is helpful to know that there is no one right way to look at the course, or to look at the marriage relationship, for that matter. So relax and enjoy the rich perspectives each couple will bring to the table.

Then, the second danger in leading this course, or really any course, is that somehow, without warning, this whole process will mutate into something predictable and dull. That means that the times of refreshment and song, the times of large-group presentation and small-group discussions will somehow lose their freshness and turn stale. And the quickest way to slide down the hill into a dry routine is to take the course, or any of the activities, too seriously. One sure way to strip away the energy and excitement about the course is to get caught up in worrying about “getting it right” instead of enjoying the moments of joyful sharing, laughter, and insight. So to prevent this from happening to you, approach each session as a time of *celebration* for couples to come and be refreshed. And leave the concerns about “getting it right” at the door.

So relax, have fun. Come to the reunion. Eat a little, sing a little, laugh a whole lot. Enjoy yourself and enjoy the company of the participants—couples who “took the plunge” into the adventure we call marriage.