

# The Meaning and Contribution of the Marriage Preparation Course to the Happiness of Married Couples at St. Paul Station, Beganding

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**Abstract:** Marriage preparation courses have become increasingly important for couples who wish to build a strong foundation for their relationships. These courses provide couples with the tools to understand and navigate their roles and responsibilities in a marriage. For Catholic couples, attending marriage preparation courses is seen as an essential step in preparing for a lifelong commitment, in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. According to John Paul II (1981) in *Familiaris Consortio*, a document that outlines the duties and responsibilities of families, the preparation for marriage should be holistic, addressing not only the emotional and social aspects but also the spiritual and theological dimensions of family life. This study specifically aims to explore the meaning and impact of marriage preparation courses on the happiness of Catholic families at the St. Paul Beganding station. Using a qualitative approach, the research employed a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation techniques to gather data. The study involved 12 informants, including five married couples who had attended marriage preparation courses, one Parhanger (a community leader), and one parish priest under the St. Peter and Paul Kabanjahe parish. The findings reveal that marriage preparation courses had a significant and positive effect on the happiness of Catholic families, particularly those at the St. Paul Beganding station. The course content provided couples with a deeper understanding of their roles and duties as spouses and parents, allowing them to build stronger, more resilient relationships. Participants expressed that the courses helped them address challenges more effectively and fostered a greater sense of commitment and mutual respect. This, in turn, contributed to the overall happiness of their families. Couples who had attended the course reported stronger emotional and spiritual connections, further emphasizing the importance of comprehensive marriage preparation for long-term marital success.

**Keywords:** Catholic Family; Familiaris Consortio; Family Happiness; Marriage Preparation Course; Spiritual Emotional Growth

## 1. Introduction

Marriage in the Catholic Church is not merely an agreement between two individuals, but it is also a sacrament that symbolizes the union between Christ and His Church, as stated in Ephesians 5:31–32. For this reason, married life does not only require love and commitment, but also readiness and a deep understanding of the responsibilities involved in building a harmonious and happy family. In the Catholic Church, marriage has three essential characteristics that are considered foundational principles for establishing a family in accordance with the teachings of Christ. The first is monogamy, which means that marriage

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in the Catholic Church can only be entered into between one man and one woman. This implies that marriage must take place between two persons of different sexes and cannot be performed between two individuals of the same sex. These principles reflect the theological conviction that marriage is a sacred covenant designed by God and entrusted to humanity as part of His divine plan.

The second characteristic is fidelity, which in the Catholic understanding is a lifelong commitment that cannot be annulled or dissolved through divorce. This means that the husband and wife are expected to remain faithful to one another and are not permitted to abandon each other under any circumstances. Fidelity is viewed not only as a moral duty but also as a spiritual discipline that strengthens the bond between spouses. The third characteristic is unity, in which marriage is understood as a permanent union between two people that cannot be separated by anything or anyone. This unity requires mutual support, respect, and a willingness to face life's challenges together. According to Lon Servatius (2020), these three characteristics form the theological and moral foundation of Catholic marriage, ensuring that it reflects God's eternal covenant with His people.

However, in the reality of modern life, many young couples encounter a variety of challenges in living out their married life. Some of these challenges include a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife, ineffective communication, economic pressures, and the influence of modern culture, which often contradicts Catholic marital values. Studies have shown that couples who do not receive sufficient preparation before marriage are more vulnerable to conflict and disharmony compared to those who attend a Marriage Preparation Course (Mayolla & Rynanta, 2024). Without proper guidance, newlyweds may struggle to develop healthy conflict resolution skills and shared values. The demands of contemporary life often test the stability of marriage, especially during the first years. This highlights the crucial need for intentional formation and preparation before entering into the sacrament.

Fidelity plays a particularly important role in helping families uphold their commitment to remain together in building their marital life. Young families essentially need time to adjust to each other, harmonizing their lifestyles and expectations. The early years of marriage can present numerous challenges and obstacles as couples learn to navigate life together. During this period, patience, communication, and mutual understanding become indispensable for a lasting relationship. However, problems can arise when marital conflicts involve the interference of parents, especially when the couple is unable to resolve issues independently. As Batta (2021) observes, such interference can sometimes strain the marital relationship despite the sacred bond sealed in the sacrament of marriage.

As part of the preparation before receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Catholic Church requires couples to participate in a Marriage Preparation Course (Kursus Persiapan Perkawinan, KPP). This course is designed to help couples deepen their understanding of the meaning, values, and responsibilities of marriage in the light of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) No. 1632 affirms that "preparation for marriage is of prime importance so that the couple may know and embrace the values and responsibilities of married and family life" (John Paul II, 1992). Through KPP, couples are equipped with practical skills for communication, financial management, and spiritual growth. It also serves as a means to reflect on the theological meaning of marriage as a vocation and mission within

the Church. In this way, the Marriage Preparation Course becomes both a pastoral and formative tool for ensuring the stability and happiness of married couples in the Catholic tradition.

## 2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Marriage preparation courses, often referred to as pre-marital counseling or pre-cana within the Catholic tradition, have been widely recognized as essential interventions prior to entering married life. These programs aim to equip couples with the skills, values, and understanding necessary to navigate the complexities of marriage. Smith (2018) argues that structured pre-marital education significantly enhances communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, and mutual understanding between partners. Likewise, Johnson and Lee (2020) highlight the role of such courses in strengthening spiritual values, particularly in faith-based communities. In the Catholic context, the Marriage Preparation Course (MPC) is understood not merely as a pedagogical activity but as a pastoral mission of the Church, aligning with the teaching of *Familiaris Consortio* (John Paul II, 1981) which calls for proper and systematic preparation for the sacrament of marriage. Course content often encompasses theological foundations, communication dynamics, conflict management, family spirituality, and the responsibilities of parenting.

Previous research has examined the relationship between marriage preparation and marital happiness with generally positive findings. Larson et al. (2019) observed that couples who participated in structured pre-marital education reported higher levels of marital adjustment and experienced lower divorce rates within the first five years of marriage compared to those who did not attend such programs. Similarly, Garcia and Fernandez (2021) found that faith-oriented marriage preparation enhanced couples' sense of shared purpose and spiritual intimacy, which in turn contributed to long-term relationship stability. Despite these insights, studies focusing on small, local parish contexts—particularly in rural or remote Catholic stations—remain limited. Most existing research has been conducted in urban or diocesan-level settings, where resources, facilitators, and participant demographics may differ significantly. This leaves a notable gap in understanding how marriage preparation programs function and contribute to marital happiness in smaller communities such as St. Paul Station in Beganding.

The present study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis of marriage preparation and marital happiness. The Relationship Maintenance Theory (Stafford & Canary, 1991) emphasizes that marital satisfaction is sustained through consistent positive communication, mutual support, and effective conflict management—all of which are addressed within marriage preparation courses. Faith Development Theory (Fowler, 1981) underscores the role of spiritual maturity in shaping personal and relational commitments, thereby offering a theological rationale for integrating faith-based values into marital preparation. Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) further suggests that marital outcomes are influenced by multiple layers of social context, including family, church, and community, which makes it crucial to analyze marriage preparation within the specific parish environment in which it is implemented.

While previous studies have provided evidence of the benefits of marriage preparation courses, few have examined the meaning couples attribute to these experiences and how they perceive such courses as contributing to their marital happiness. Much of the existing literature focuses on quantitative measures of marital satisfaction, with limited qualitative exploration of couples' lived experiences and personal interpretations. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating both the perceived meaning and practical contributions of the Marriage Preparation Course to the happiness of married couples at St. Paul Station, Beganding. Through a focus on the realities of a rural parish community, it aims to provide a more nuanced understanding that complements the findings of large-scale and urban-focused research.

### 3. Proposed Method

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the alignment between the meaning and contribution of the Marriage Preparation Course and the lived experience of married couples. This approach enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of both the conceptual meaning and the practical contribution of the course as it is implemented in St. Paul Station, Beganding, which is part of St. Peter and Paul Parish in Kabanjahe, Karo Regency, North Sumatra. By focusing on this particular setting, the study seeks to explore how the program is contextualized within the local pastoral reality and how it responds to the specific needs of couples in the community. The research does not only aim to document factual events, but also to interpret the values, expectations, and transformations experienced by the participants. Through this, the study hopes to provide insight into how such a course can contribute to marital harmony and faithfulness in accordance with Catholic teaching. The focus on both meaning and contribution allows the research to address theological, pastoral, and sociocultural dimensions in a holistic manner.

In order to collect comprehensive and reliable data, the study employs three primary techniques, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation review. Participatory observation allows the researcher to directly witness the interactions, teachings, and dynamics of the Marriage Preparation Course, thereby capturing not only explicit content but also implicit values communicated during the process. In-depth interviews are conducted with various stakeholders, including married couples who have completed the course, pastoral workers, and facilitators, to gather personal experiences and perceptions. Documentation review includes examining parish records, course materials, and related pastoral guidelines to understand the official framework and objectives of the program. This combination of methods ensures that the research findings are grounded in both empirical observation and personal narratives. The integration of these methods also makes it possible to cross-check findings and uncover deeper meanings that may not be immediately visible through one single data source.

Data analysis is carried out through several structured stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as recommended in qualitative research methodology. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, and focusing on information that is most relevant to the research questions. The data display stage organizes the findings in a way that allows patterns, relationships, and themes to emerge clearly. Conclusion drawing involves

interpreting these patterns in light of Catholic theology, pastoral practice, and the social realities of the local community. The validity of the findings is strengthened through triangulation, which cross-verifies data from different methods and sources, and through direct confirmation with informants to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The research is conducted over the period of March to April 2025, with St. Paul Station, Beganding chosen as the research site due to preliminary observations indicating the active implementation of a Marriage Preparation Course. This makes the location not only pastorally significant but also academically valuable for studying the role of marriage preparation in sustaining Catholic family life.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### **The Meaning of the Marriage Preparation Course for the Happiness of Married Couples**

The Marriage Preparation Course is a structured program designed to assist couples who are planning to marry in preparing themselves emotionally, mentally, and practically for married life. It is typically composed of a series of sessions that cover various topics relevant to family life, with the aim of building a solid foundation for the future happiness and stability of the household. The meaning of the Marriage Preparation Course (KPP) can be examined from two primary perspectives, namely the individual and the social dimensions. From the individual perspective, the KPP equips couples with knowledge and understanding of the importance of commitment in marital relationships, as well as strategies for managing conflicts that may arise in their future life together. From the social perspective, the KPP functions as a formative process that prepares couples to fulfill their social roles as husband and wife in ways that contribute to building a stable, loving, and productive family unit within the broader community. In this sense, the KPP is not merely a formal requirement of the Church but a pastoral and educational initiative that shapes the personal character and social mission of future families.

##### **Definition and Nature of the Marriage Preparation Course**

The Marriage Preparation Course (KPP) is an essential pastoral tool for couples preparing to enter into the sacrament of marriage. Through this course, engaged couples are provided with knowledge about Catholic marriage, including its unique purposes and characteristics. The program addresses theological, moral, psychological, and practical aspects of married life, offering insights that will serve as a guide for building a joyful and enduring family (Mardila & Wijaya, 2022). According to Lon Servatius (2020), the KPP is a guidance program intended to deepen couples' understanding of the nature of marriage, the responsibilities of spouses, spiritual and moral values, as well as the legal and social dimensions of family life. It emphasizes that marriage is not only a legal and social contract, but also a lifelong vocation that requires unconditional love, fidelity, and self-giving commitment. In Catholic understanding, a husband and wife are a man and a woman who have been baptized and who have entered into the covenant of marriage, forming a communion of the whole of life. This communion involves a unity of heart and mind, even though the spouses are two distinct individuals. The foundation of a valid marriage lies in mutual love, expressed through

the free consent of both parties, which is also a juridical requirement for the validity of the marital covenant (Jerico et al., 2022).

### **Aims and Additional Requirements of the Marriage Preparation Course**

Beyond the core objectives, the Marriage Preparation Course is designed to provide engaged couples with essential knowledge in theology, psychology, morality, sexuality, health, economics, gender awareness, and other relevant fields closely related to family life. In addition to the KPP, the Catholic Church also requires a canonical investigation before marriage. The canonical investigation is considered one of the most effective ways to ensure that a future marriage will be well-founded, loving, and rooted in a Christian spirit (Asrot Purba & Junius Setiawan Sihombing, 2023). This process collects essential information from both parties intending to marry, such as birth details, parental background, religion, occupation, and address. More importantly, it includes a personal declaration by each party regarding their readiness and complete understanding of the Catholic faith in marriage. The investigation involves a confidential interview conducted by a priest, based on a formal questionnaire that is adapted into simple and clear language. While the process is confidential, its outcome determines whether the marriage may proceed according to Church law (Lon, 2020). This shows that the Church approaches marriage not only from a pastoral perspective but also with canonical rigor to safeguard the sanctity of the sacrament.

### **Theological and Pastoral Foundations**

The Marriage Preparation Course also reflects the teaching of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), which explains the importance of beginning married life with a process of preparation. Through the KPP, engaged couples are guided to recognize more deeply the significance of their decision to respond to God's call through marriage and family life. The assistance offered in the course is presented in a structured framework that outlines its content, timing, and methods, ensuring a balance between doctrinal teaching, pedagogy, legal aspects, and health concerns related to marriage (John Paul II, 1981). Conducting a Marriage Preparation Course is part of the Church's mission to accompany and guide engaged couples, helping them to grow in their understanding of responsibility and the maturity of love they will cultivate in their domestic Church. Awareness of the sacred vocation of family life, which is also a deeply human value, motivates the Church to be present in offering guidance, protecting, and upholding the holiness of marriage as a sacrament. The Church proclaims the Gospel values, sharing the Good News with everyone, particularly those called to marriage and family life, affirming that marriage is willed by God from creation and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ (Wea, 2020).

### **Marriage as a Communion of Love According to God's Plan**

God wills that marriage should exist as a communion of love, just as God Himself is love and lives in the communion of the Holy Trinity. In this divine plan, marriage is more than a human arrangement; it is a participation in the very nature of God's love. The marital covenant is intended to foster fraternity, unity, and a life communion that unites the soul and body of the spouses. This calling is not only a gift but also a mission, requiring continual growth in mutual self-giving and openness to God's grace. The Church, through pastoral care and sacramental life, supports couples in this journey so that their marriage becomes a living witness of God's love to the world. In this way, the Marriage Preparation Course becomes an indispensable part of the Church's evangelizing mission, preparing couples not only for a

successful marriage but for a holy and fruitful one that contributes to the life of the Church and society.

### **Benefits of the Marriage Preparation Course**

One of the primary benefits of the Marriage Preparation Course is the improvement of communication between partners. The course provides structured training on how to engage in effective and respectful dialogue, recognizing that communication is the foundation of a healthy marital relationship. Good communication skills enable couples to resolve disagreements constructively, clarify misunderstandings, and express needs and feelings openly. Participants are taught the importance of active listening, which involves giving full attention to their spouse without prematurely judging or interrupting. They also learn how to express emotions in ways that invite empathy rather than defensiveness, creating an atmosphere where both partners feel heard and valued. By strengthening this fundamental skill, the Marriage Preparation Course helps lay a firm foundation for long-term marital harmony.

Another significant advantage of the course is the development of conflict management skills. In every relationship, conflicts are inevitable, but the way they are handled can either strengthen or weaken the bond between spouses. The course teaches couples to view conflict not merely as a source of tension but as an opportunity for growth, mutual understanding, and problem-solving. Couples are introduced to practical strategies for de-escalating tense situations, identifying the root causes of disagreements, and working collaboratively towards solutions. This includes learning to manage differences in values, habits, and expectations without resorting to personal attacks or withdrawal. By practicing these skills, couples become better equipped to navigate the challenges that naturally arise over the course of their shared life.

The course also fosters a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities inherent in marriage. Couples are guided to reflect on their individual strengths and the ways they can contribute to the well-being of the family unit. This includes the management of household finances, the division of domestic duties, and shared responsibilities in child-rearing. Emphasis is placed on the principle that these roles are not rigidly fixed but should be adapted according to the evolving needs of the couple and the family. The aim is to build a partnership characterized by mutual respect, cooperation, and shared commitment to the welfare of all members of the household. By clarifying expectations early on, the course helps prevent future misunderstandings and fosters a cooperative spirit.

Emotional skills development is another crucial focus of the Marriage Preparation Course. Couples are encouraged to recognize and regulate their own emotions while also offering emotional support to one another during times of stress, disappointment, or uncertainty. These skills are essential for maintaining emotional intimacy and resilience within the marriage. The course introduces techniques for emotional self-awareness, empathy, and stress management, helping couples to remain connected and supportive even in the face of significant challenges. A relationship in which both partners can effectively manage emotions tends to be more stable, loving, and satisfying.

The program also encourages couples to identify and discuss shared values and life goals. This process ensures that both partners are aligned in their vision for the future, whether it relates to career aspirations, financial priorities, parenting philosophies, or religious

commitments. Having a shared direction helps couples make unified decisions, strengthens their sense of purpose, and reduces the likelihood of major disagreements over life choices. By fostering this alignment, the course strengthens the marital bond and provides a roadmap for the couple's life together.

Lastly, the course offers preparation for life after the wedding, providing realistic expectations about the joys and challenges of married life. Participants are encouraged to anticipate potential difficulties, such as financial strain, differences in family traditions, or adjustments in lifestyle, and to develop proactive strategies for addressing them. This preparation instills confidence in couples as they transition from engagement to married life, equipping them with the mindset and skills needed to build a strong and enduring union. The overall purpose of the Marriage Preparation Course is to ensure that couples enter into the sacrament of marriage not only with love and commitment but also with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual grounding necessary for lifelong happiness.

### **Marriage According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law**

The nature and purpose of marriage in the Catholic tradition are clearly articulated in Canon 1055 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Canon 1055 § 1 states that by the marriage covenant, a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, which by its nature is ordered toward the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. This covenant, between the baptized, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. Canon 1055 § 2 further affirms that between baptized persons, there can be no valid marital contract that is not by that fact a sacrament. These provisions emphasize that marriage in the Catholic Church is both a natural and supernatural reality, rooted in God's plan for humanity and elevated to a sign of Christ's love for His Church.

Canon 1055 specifically grounds the definition of marriage in its dual nature as both a covenant (*foedus*) and a sacrament. From its very nature, marriage is a conscious and free agreement between a man and a woman to enter into an exclusive and permanent partnership. This partnership symbolizes and makes present the covenant that God has established with humanity, both in the Old Covenant between Yahweh and Israel and in the New Covenant between Christ and His Church. The covenantal aspect means that marriage is not merely a legal arrangement but a total personal commitment involving spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions. It requires full consent and mutual self-giving, reflecting the faithfulness, permanence, and fruitfulness of God's love.

In the Jewish tradition, a covenant (*berith*) signifies a binding agreement that establishes a relationship as enduring and binding as that between persons related by blood. Such a relationship does not cease even if one party attempts to withdraw from the agreement. This understanding informs the Catholic view that marriage is irrevocable once validly entered into and consummated. The free choice of the spouses to enter into marriage entails the establishment of a personal relationship that encompasses their entire being. As Mayolla & Rynanta (2024) note, this includes not only the physical union but also a profound spiritual and emotional bond.

The sacramental nature of marriage means that it is a visible sign of an invisible grace. By their mutual consent and self-giving, the spouses become ministers of the sacrament to each other, with God as the source of the grace that sustains their union. This grace

strengthens them to live out their vocation faithfully, to persevere in times of trial, and to be open to the gift of life. The permanence and unity of marriage are not simply ideals but theological realities grounded in the sacramental economy of the Church. Thus, the Church's teaching on marriage is inseparable from its pastoral practice of preparing couples through programs like the Marriage Preparation Course.

In light of this, the Catholic understanding of marriage is not merely concerned with legal or cultural definitions but with the full integration of faith, love, and life. The covenant is meant to be a living witness to God's enduring love for His people. For this reason, the Church invests considerable effort in ensuring that couples are well-prepared before entering into marriage, recognizing that such preparation is essential not only for the happiness of the spouses but also for the stability of the family and the vitality of the Church itself.

### **Improvement of Communication**

The marriage preparation course plays a significant role in equipping couples with the skills needed to communicate effectively. Communication is widely recognized as one of the fundamental pillars of a healthy marital relationship, serving as the primary means through which partners express their thoughts, emotions, expectations, and needs. In the sessions dedicated to communication skills, couples are guided to understand that good communication is not merely about speaking but also about listening attentively and empathetically. This involves learning to be present in conversations, avoiding distractions, and truly comprehending the perspective of the other person before responding. Furthermore, the course teaches couples to articulate their feelings clearly, without resorting to ambiguous language or passive-aggressive expressions that can cause misunderstandings. By practicing these skills, couples develop the ability to address both everyday matters and sensitive issues constructively, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflicts escalating into deeper relational problems.

### **Conflict Management**

Every relationship, regardless of how harmonious it may appear, will inevitably face conflicts. The marriage preparation course acknowledges this reality and offers couples concrete strategies to navigate disagreements in a constructive and respectful manner. Rather than viewing conflict as a sign of failure or incompatibility, the course reframes it as an opportunity for growth, mutual understanding, and deeper connection. Couples are taught practical tools such as active listening during heated moments, identifying underlying needs or fears behind disagreements, and using "I-statements" instead of accusatory language to express concerns. Through role-play exercises and real-life examples, the course demonstrates how conflicts can be resolved without causing emotional harm or eroding trust. Additionally, participants learn the importance of choosing the right timing and environment for sensitive discussions, ensuring that both parties are emotionally ready to engage productively. By fostering a mindset that sees conflict as a pathway to greater intimacy rather than division, the course prepares couples to face future challenges with resilience and unity.

### **Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities**

An essential aspect of the marriage preparation course is helping couples develop a clear and realistic understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities within the marriage. This component addresses not only the traditional expectations of husband and wife but also the evolving dynamics in modern family life. Topics discussed include the management of

household finances, the equitable division of domestic tasks, and the shared responsibility of raising and nurturing children. Couples are encouraged to have open conversations about their expectations in these areas before entering marriage to prevent misunderstandings and unspoken resentments later on. The course also emphasizes that roles in marriage should not be rigid or dictated solely by cultural stereotypes but should be negotiated in a way that reflects mutual respect, individual strengths, and shared values. By clarifying these responsibilities in advance, couples can establish a strong foundation of cooperation and mutual support, which is vital for long-term marital satisfaction.

### **Development of Emotional Skills**

Beyond practical matters, the marriage preparation course places a strong emphasis on the emotional dimension of marriage. Emotional intelligence is presented as a crucial skill that influences how couples relate to each other in times of both joy and adversity. Participants learn to recognize their own emotional patterns, identify triggers that may lead to negative interactions, and develop strategies for self-regulation. Furthermore, the course encourages partners to become a source of emotional support for each other, particularly during periods of stress, loss, or uncertainty. This involves not only offering comfort and encouragement but also respecting each other's coping styles and personal boundaries. By mastering these emotional skills, couples increase their capacity for empathy, patience, and forgiveness—qualities that significantly enhance the quality and stability of their relationship. In essence, the course helps couples to not only love each other but to truly understand and care for one another on a deeper emotional level.

### **Introduction to Shared Values and Goals**

A strong and lasting marriage is often built upon a shared vision for the future, which is why the marriage preparation course dedicates time to helping couples articulate and align their core values and life goals. Through guided discussions and reflective exercises, couples explore topics such as their beliefs about faith, family, career aspirations, lifestyle preferences, and community involvement. These conversations are not meant to enforce uniformity but to ensure that both partners understand where their values converge and where they differ. In doing so, couples can identify potential areas of compromise and establish a unified direction for their life together. When both individuals are committed to the same overarching goals, such as raising children with certain moral principles or working toward financial stability, it creates a sense of purpose and shared mission that strengthens the marital bond. This alignment also serves as a compass during challenging times, enabling couples to navigate difficulties without losing sight of their ultimate objectives.

### **Preparation for Post-Marriage Life**

One of the most practical benefits of the marriage preparation course is that it equips couples with realistic expectations about married life after the wedding day. Many newlyweds face challenges not because of incompatibility, but because they are unprepared for the adjustments required in the transition from single to married life. The course provides insights into common post-marriage realities, such as changes in daily routines, the blending of social circles, the impact of in-laws, and the financial adjustments that come with shared living. It also addresses potential stressors such as infertility, job loss, relocation, or health issues, and offers strategies for facing these challenges together. By discussing these topics openly before marriage, couples enter their union with a clearer understanding of the road ahead and greater

confidence in their ability to face life's ups and downs as a team. In this way, the course does not merely prepare couples for the wedding ceremony but for the lifelong journey of marriage itself.

### **The Concept of a Happy Family in the Catholic Perspective**

In Catholic teaching, true happiness is the result of an intimate and profound relationship with God, leading to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the purpose of our lives. True happiness, according to Catholic doctrine, cannot be separated from love. Love is the core of Christ's teaching, and through love, we can experience God's presence in our lives. When we love and serve others, we not only fulfill God's commandments but also discover a deeper meaning and purpose in life. Genuine love brings peace and joy that cannot be offered by worldly possessions or temporary pleasures.

In addition to love, truth is also an essential element in attaining true happiness. In this context, truth is not merely about facts or information, but about living according to the teachings and principles established by God. When we live in truth, we avoid falsehood and deception that often disturb our inner peace. Truth draws us closer to God and helps us to understand His will in our lives.

Union with God's will is another crucial aspect in the pursuit of true happiness. When we surrender ourselves to His will, we open our hearts to receive His greater plan for our lives. This requires letting go of selfish desires and accepting that there is something higher and better that God has prepared for us. In this union, we find peace and fulfillment that cannot be provided by worldly pursuits.

Therefore, Catholic teaching invites us to view happiness from a deeper perspective. True happiness is not the result of material achievements or temporary pleasures but a state of the soul filled with love, truth, and unity with God. In our life journey, we are called to continually seek a closer relationship with God, which in turn will lead us toward eternal and genuine happiness.

### **The Meaning of Family in the Catholic Church**

In the teaching of the Catholic Church, the family is understood as the "Ecclesia domestica" or the domestic Church, which serves as a place for the formation of faith and love. The family plays an important role in shaping the faith of each of its members and becomes a reflection of God's love in everyday life. As the smallest community, the domestic Church functions as the primary place for faith education, where parents hold the responsibility of teaching Christian values to their children (Barkasa, 2021). This role is not only about religious instruction but also about forming a lifestyle rooted in love, respect, and service, thereby making the family a living witness of the Gospel in society.

### **The Contribution of the Marriage Preparation Course to the Happiness of Married Couples**

The Marriage Preparation Course serves as an important preventive and educational step in laying the foundation for a healthy, strong, and harmonious household. This course is not merely a session for providing theoretical knowledge but also acts as a platform to build mental, emotional, social, and spiritual readiness for engaged couples before entering married life. According to Amato and Previti (2003), one of the most significant factors influencing marital quality is the emotional and cognitive readiness of couples before marriage. In other words, couples who possess a mature understanding of their respective roles in marriage,

effective communication skills, and strategies for dealing with household conflicts tend to experience greater stability and harmony in their married life.

Emotional readiness refers to the ability of individuals to manage personal emotions, understand their partner's feelings, and communicate openly and empathetically. Cognitive readiness, on the other hand, involves the understanding of the concept of marriage, family values, and practical skills such as financial management, parenting, and joint decision-making.

By participating in this course, couples are better equipped to anticipate various challenges that commonly arise in family life. They are also provided with the skills and strategies necessary to maintain healthy communication and resolve conflicts wisely. This ultimately contributes to strengthening family resilience, reducing divorce rates, and improving both psychological and social well-being within the household.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the research conducted at St. Paul Station in Beganding regarding the influence of the Marriage Preparation Course on the happiness of Catholic families, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the Marriage Preparation Course has a significant impact on the quality of family life among Catholic believers in St. Paul Station, Beganding. This course has proven to provide adequate preparation in understanding the essence of Catholic marriage, spousal communication, conflict management, the roles of husband and wife in the family, and parental responsibilities. This is evident in the improved quality of relationships among couples who have participated in the course compared to those who have not.

The meaning of the Marriage Preparation Course is understood by couples as a form of faith formation and a deep impartation of marriage values. The course is not merely perceived as an administrative requirement before receiving the Sacrament of Marriage, but as a means of personal formation to be better prepared spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. Couples realize that marriage is a vocation that involves God as the center of their relationship, and therefore it must be lived with sincerity, responsibility, and sacrifice.

The contribution of the Marriage Preparation Course to the happiness of married couples is clearly reflected in their family life. It provides a solid foundation for building healthy communication, managing conflicts maturely, and nurturing faith awareness within the family. Many couples have experienced tangible benefits from the materials they received, particularly in fostering commitment, trust, and emotional intimacy. The course also helps couples to be better prepared in facing marital challenges with a spirit of mutual support and growth together.

Marital happiness is not automatically attained after receiving the Sacrament of Marriage; rather, it is the result of a process that involves thorough preparation, ongoing formation, and the support of the Church community. The Marriage Preparation Course thus becomes one of the key factors in shaping the foundational stage of a Catholic family life that is harmonious, whole, and joyful in the light of faith.

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