Interacting with God’s Story and Vision

A. Celebrate healthy marriages
Invite married couples (especially older ones) to share the secret of their marriages. Have younger folks interview older couples about their marriages. Invite singles to share their observations about a good marriage. Then create a poster listing the keys to a happy, healthy marriage or create a litany in praise of marriage. For ideas, refer to wedding resources online or in Words for Worship 2 (edited by Diane Zaerr Brenneman, pp. 268–72). Offer a sung blessing to married couples such as “May God Grant You a Blessing” (Hymnal: A Worship Book 422).

B. Interpreting “mutual submission” for twenty-first century Christians
Use your bodies to create a tableau or “still picture” that illustrates how the term mutual submission would have been interpreted in the first century. Talk about today’s context and the changing views on marital relationships.

» How relevant is this text?
» What better language could be used? For example, The Message interprets verse 21 like this: “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.”

Refer to The Prophet for teaching on mutuality in marriage from a century ago (look online for Kahlil Gibran’s writing on marriage).

» How do marriages today reflect respect for Christ?

Finally, create another tableau that illustrates a modern-day interpretation of mutual submission.

C. Wreath of mutuality
Invite members to give their ideas about the symbolism in the wreath (a circle represents unending love, red is for love, green is for growth and vitality, white represents the divine connection). Refer to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. The wise saying is relevant for Christian marriages: “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (NRSV). Reflect on the importance of a strong bond between partners and with God.

» What are intentional ways to keep this bond strong?
» How can the church community be helpful in promoting strong healthy Christ-centered marriages?

D. For singles only
Here are a few suggestions for single folks to dialogue with this text:

» What insights from this text (if any) can you draw that help you grow spiritually?
» How does our congregation include singles in its community life?
» Do you feel equal to married folks?
» What counsel would you like to offer the congregation (or couples) on how best to build strong relationships with singles?

Create a poster, “Keys to a Happy, Healthy Single Life.”

E. Facing today’s tough issues as a congregation
We live in an increasingly complex society and sometimes struggle to be relevant in the world. Some Christian couples are choosing to live together without being married. Others cohabitate until they can afford the kind of wedding they want. Some Christians who remarry later in life choose to live together as a married couple without a state-issued marriage license so they can keep their families’ inheritances separate and clear.

» Are these issues divisive in your church family?
» What are the rules (and unwritten expectations) around unconventional partnering?

Another issue has to do with spousal abuse.

» What is the church’s responsibility for dealing with abusive spouses who believe it is their right to dominate their marriage partner?
» If family or friends have serious concerns about someone’s marriage, to whom could they go in your congregation? What kind of help could they expect?