



**Family Support
Foundation**

*The person who does not decide
to love forever
will find it very difficult
to really love for even one day
St. John Paul II*

Love and Life Programs



Love and Life Programs were created by the **Family Support Foundation**, started by **the Institute of the Holy Family**. They are a practical expression of the Foundation's mission to serve the family – the purpose for which the Institute of the Holy Family was founded by **Abp. Kazimierz Majdański**, as a votive offering for saving his life from the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau in 1945.

Marked by an overtly modern language and form, **Love and Life Programs** draw entirely on the teaching formulated by **Bl. Pope Paul VI** in *Humanae Vitae*, together with the idea of love in marriage expressed by **St. Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II** in his *Love and Responsibility* and *Familiaris Consortio*. The Programs translate those unique documents into the language of everyday life with its concerns and challenges. The Programs' authors, Fr. Jarosław Szymczak (Institute of the Holy Family) and Agnieszka Rogalska (a wife and mother of three children), are both lecturers at the Faculty for Studies on Family Science (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Warsaw, Poland). Behind each Program there are the decades of experience in marriage counseling and spiritual direction of couples.

The Programs are presented by a team consisting of a priest (lecturer) and married coach couples – to follow Pope Paul VI's encouragement that "like should minister to like" (HV 26).

Love and Life Programs include:

- **Program for Fiancées:** "Gaudium et Spes – Joy and Hope"
- **Programs for the Development of Marital Relationship** (consisting of 9 parts: four completed, and five more in preparation)
- **"Love and Responsibility" - Program for Students** to be held at students' chaplaincies
- Planned for future: **"Not Alone" – Program for Single Adults** seeking a life partner
- A character-building Program for Teenagers.

PROGRAM FOR FIANCÉES

“GAUDIUM ET SPES – JOY AND HOPE”



Developed on the basis of St. Karol Wojtyła’s *Love and Responsibility*, the Program for Fiancées includes the following thematic parts:

1. **What do we need marriage for?**
2. **Do we know each other?**
3. **Is that YOU?**
4. **How do I love you?**
5. **What will happen after the wedding?**
6. **Why do we need God?**
7. **Living by the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage**

Each session consists of: a lecture + presentation, workshop, married couple’s testimony, group discussion and individual dialogue between the fiancées.

In 2013 the Program for Fiancées, enjoying great popularity, was listed by Card. Kazimierz Nycz among the obligatory marriage preparation courses in Warsaw Archdiocese.

LOVE AND LIFE PROGRAMS FOR MARRIED COUPLES



The **Programs for the Development of Marital Relationship** answer the appeal of Pope Paul VI, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI to create a new language of addressing the families, who need to cope with the challenges of cultural change of our age.

The Programs are intended to equip the couples with knowledge and skills not only to solve conflicts, but also to look after their love in everyday life and in various external circumstances. Each Program consists of:

1. **LECTURES** based on actual experience through the decades of marriage counseling
2. **DYNAMIC WORKSHOPS** which show practical illustrations to the information included in the lectures. The couples are asked to do different tasks using props and visual aids, so they might “experience” the content of the lecture.
3. **INDIVIDUAL COUPLE DIALOGUE** - time reserved especially for a husband-and-wife conversation.

The **Programs for the Development of Marital Relationship** consist of 9 parts, divided into three groups called:

NATURE

Program 1: I + YOU=WE

Program 2: WE + Family

Program 3: OUR FAMILY + Society

GRACE

Program 4: I + God

Program 5: WE + God

Program 6: OUR FAMILY + God

MISSION

Program 7: I in the Service of the Church

Program 8: WE in the Service of the Church

Program 9: OUR FAMILY in the Service of the Church

1st Program for the Development of Marital Relationship **I + YOU = WE**



Some of the questions which **Program 1** answers are:

- What are the reasons for feeling disappointed in marriage?
 - What type of personality are you?
 - How do men and women talk about their emotions?
- Why is a compromise the first step to the breakdown of a relationship?
 - How to protect our love?

Program 1: “I+YOU=WE” is a weekend couples retreat which consists of 6 thematic parts. The topics were selected on the basis of the problems identified by married couples and the personal experience of the Program's authors. The topics include:

- 1. Idealized Visions Versus Reality**
- 2. Respect & Acceptance of Differences**
- 3. Gift Not Demand**
- 4. A Time for Us**
- 5. Dialogue & Communication**
- 6. Sealing the Gift of Sexuality**

Each topic is viewed from the perspective of the **marriage vows**: honesty, fidelity and love. Honesty – helps the participants see where they are now and what needs to be changed. Fidelity – shows the truth of the spouses’ vocation. Love – gives them specific tools to be able to fulfill their life mission together.

The audience is led through the lectures with both a sense of humor and an overtly pragmatic approach. The participants are given professional and clear training materials, including workshop materials, insightful interpersonal tests, practical prompts, and resources for self-study.

After the Program each couple is given the opportunity to take part in 9 months of **follow-up guidance**. The Program participants are given homework assignments, one per each month, which encourages them to put into practice the 6 topics of the retreat. At the end of each month, the couples are asked to write a report and submit it to the Family Support Foundation coach couples who led them through the workshop part of the Program. It is recommended also that coach couples hold monthly meetings for the graduates of the Program, during which time they might share the ups and downs on their way to a better marriage.

2nd Program

for the Development of Marital Relationship

WE + Family



Program 2 addresses the spouses as potential and actual parents and situates them within the wider context of relationships with their families of origin and parents-in-law. It also helps them define their unique identity as a particular family:

1. Decision on Parenthood
2. Parenthood as Gift for Marriage
3. Marriage as Foundation for Parenthood
4. Our Marriage within Generations – Looking Back
5. Compass of Values
6. Our Marriage within Generations – Looking Ahead

3rd Program

for the Development of Marital Relationship

OUR FAMILY + Society



Very practical in content and form, **Program 3** addresses the family as part of society, and helps the spouses revise their values in relation to popular culture, work (both at the workplace and at home), team building, social responsibility and patriotism:

1. Culture Invited Home
2. Why Work
3. Work-Life Balance
4. Friends of Our Marriage
5. Imagination of Mercy
6. Common Good of State and Nation

Programs 4-6
I + God
WE + God
OUR FAMILY + God



Programs 4-6 let the spouses see themselves in relationship with God. The guiding idea for those Programs has been inspired by the thought on love in marriage worded in *Gaudium et Spes* 49: God's love (*caritas*) "heals, perfects and exalts" human love (*amor*).

Program 4: "I + GOD" includes 6 sessions:

1. Path to Meeting God
2. Meeting God
3. Discovering Myself in the Meeting with God: Husband
4. Discovering Myself in the Meeting with God: Wife
5. Life in Relationship with God
6. Life in God's Perspective

RECEPTION AND TESTIMONIES

Love and Life Programs (the Program for Fiancées and 1-4 Programs for the Development of Marital Relationship) have been run systematically since 2009 in Poland. Program 1: “I+YOU=WE” has been offered also in many places abroad:

- **in Omaha, Nebraska, USA**, at Dr. Thomas W. Hilgers’ **Pope Paul VI Institute** – as a physician couple retreat for NaProTechnology doctors

The Programs in their content and form have been found a valuable companion for the environment of **NaProTechnology** and **FertilityCare Professionals** in assisting couples coping with fertility-related problems. Their relationships are especially fragile and prone to risk in the situation of chronic stress resulting from problems in that area.

- **in Springfield, Illinois, USA** - where the Program has been admitted as the Diocese of Springfield couple retreat
- **in Germany**
- **in France**
- **in Belgium**
- **in the United Kingdom**
- **in Mexico**

Testimonies form Program 1: “I+YOU=WE” Participants:

My wife and I attended the I + YOU = WE retreat in Omaha, Nebraska from February 9-12, 2012. I can say, without reservation, that it is the marriage retreat that has actually produced the longest lasting fruits of any retreat in our life. Fr. Szymczak knows and loves God’s people, and so his extremely practical guidance for how to truly persevere with God’s grace in making changes for the better leave other retreat formats that we have experienced looking pale in comparison. After other retreats, once the “retreat high” goes away so do the good resolutions and intentions that were formed in the retreat setting.

Not only does Fr.’s retreat have an unprecedented follow up associated with it, the retreat content itself is highly unique. I am not familiar with any retreats currently being offered anywhere in the United States that enable retreatants to so readily receive the teachings and wisdom of Holy Mother Church, particularly through the patrimony of Blessed Pope John Paul the Great. The instructive portion of each section of the retreat was one of my favorite parts of the experience. Learning from Fr. how to peel back the layers of life’s grimy residue on our marital love by making distinctions and clarifications was very profound for me. Fr.’s presentations enabled me to accomplish the reasonable task of turning the light of the Gospel onto my behavior in our marriage.

I am confident that EVERYONE who is open to it can experience something similar when they receive the work of Fr.'s ministry. This is a testament to Fr. Jay and his staff, but it is also the most sterling testimony to the fact that the retreat material is built upon the solid framework of Christ's teachings, magisterial documents and pastoral experience. All of these elements come in "under people's radar". During the retreat, one is never bludgeoned with any doctrine at any point; rather one is exposed to powerful distinctions and clarifications that enable one to see counterfeit goods and views for what they are – sad alternatives to a life lived in union with Christ and His Church. Fr. Jay exudes joy and peace; he is an incredibly unique priest who unambiguously is conformed to Jesus Christ crucified (*Familiaris consortio* #9) and therefore is the perfect retreat master/teacher.

Our group of 4 couples from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois chose to attend the I + You = Us retreat this year because we earnestly desire to partner with Fr. Jay in his ministry of making known the Good News of Jesus Christ to married couples in our Diocese. The Development of Marital Relations Program is an extremely reasonable manner in which the Church can go about ministering to couples, families and our American society. The retreat is not just simply about cultivating a "good experience" for spouses; rather it truly is about enabling spouses to seriously embark on the journey of our vocation to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48).

Carlos Tejeda
Director - Office for Marriage and Family Life
Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

In February, 2011, my fiancée, Kristina, and I attended a retreat in Omaha, Nebraska, sponsored by the Pope Paul VI Institute. The retreat was given by Fr. Jay Szymczak from the Institute of Family Studies in Poland. The retreat was an English language adaptation of the 1st Program for the Development of Marital Relations, called *I + You = We*, which is presented to couples as part of their marriage formation in Poland. The February retreat was the first time the retreat was offered in the United States.

Kristina and I had already attended the Engaged Encounter retreat prescribed by our diocese, which provided an opportunity for dialogue about key topics relating to marriage, but the *I + You = We* retreat was much more helpful than the diocesan one for several reasons.

First, the *I + You = We* presented enlightening content in six areas of married life: Idealistic visions and reality, Respect and acceptance of differences, Gift - not demands, Time for us, Dialogue and communication, and Sexual intimacy. Each area was approached from the standpoint of faithfulness, honesty, and love. A lecture was given on each area, which was summarized in a flow chart in the retreat workbook, a format that was easily understood. Couples had ample time after each presentation to discuss what was heard. Kristina and I appreciated the depth of the material presented. There were many examples given; for instance, six examples were given for what "I take thee" does **not** mean. Much of the material was presented in the form of questions which prompted us to

reflect; for example, "To whom do I make my vow? To an idealistic vision of my spouse, or to a flesh-and-blood human being?" Having the workbook will allow us to re-visit the retreat throughout our marriage, and reconnect by seeing how we answer the homework questions at the end of each section.

As a result of this retreat, Kristina and I talked a lot more about the nature of marriage as a vocation... specific ways that we will need to sacrifice and be humble in order to help ourselves and one another reach Heaven. We benefited from the section about similarities and differences, in that we talked more about our differences and how that affects our relationship. We also had a beneficial discussion on how to prioritize our time and balance our spheres of marital activity. Another topic we particularly appreciated was "defending your spouse," which was an exercise in the importance of interpreting a spouse's actions in a positive light. Now that we are married, we have talked about how we have or have not done this in certain situations!

The *I + You = We* retreat gave us two things that we did not hear in either our diocesan retreat or counseling sessions with our pastor - specific advice, and a scriptural presentation of the ideal. An example of specific advice was, "If you feel that you are on the verge of wounding your spouse with a word, take his/her hand and embrace them." An example of a scriptural presentation of the ideal that challenges me to think was, "Am I capable of the attitude that the mountains should sooner be shaken than my patience for what my spouse says shall fail?" When I re-read these words which I first heard on retreat, I realize that I often lose patience with my spouse much too early, and that it is a holy thing to be patient. Because of the retreat, I see more specifically how being faithful, honest, and loving to my spouse can help me to practice biblical principles and realize where my priorities should be. Kristina and I appreciated the balance of research and religion provided. We have reflected more on the importance of received not only the Eucharist, but Reconciliation, if we are to be humble and holier and thus become a better spouse to one another.

Another facet of the *I + You = We* retreat that we appreciated was the fact that we took the retreat with couples in different stages of marriage and from different geographic areas. It was comforting to see that even couples who have been married for many years have some things to discuss and work on, but that a high level of peace, trust, and comfort can be reached. After hearing some experiences of other couples, we began to reflect more deeply on how our marriage will be affected by the addition of children.

Kristina and I strongly endorse the *I + You = We* retreat and the Program for Development of Marital Relations as offered by Fr. Jay. We have volunteered our assistance the next time the retreat is offered in our area. We think the program is the best thing we encountered out of everything in our formal marriage preparation, and we strongly endorse it for any diocese or organization that wishes to use it!

*John and Kristina Pakiz
Omaha, Nebraska*

When we came across the “I+YOU=WE” Program, we had already gone through a marriage therapy which was unsuccessful. It was suggested to us to divorce “to the benefit of all of us”. The Program, which appealed to both of us due to its dynamic form and the wealth of experience of the Retreat Master, left us with the ray of hope and was the impulse for the true healing of our marriage – the long-term process which lasts to this very day.

Małgosia and Andrzej, Poland

After 33 years of marriage our relationship has been refreshed and renovated, touching key subjects we were not aware of. It has given us light to better understand our daughters’ marriages and our role as parents and parents-in-law. As a university professor México City, the program has given me a fresh message to communicate to my young students on the wonderful value of love, life and respect for each human person.

Roberto Garza Castellón Cantú, México City

The “I+YOU=WE” Program offers the basic knowledge for each marriage to function properly. It’s a good retreat for those who are willing to test the condition of their relationship in a relatively short time (weekend).

From the Participant of the “I+YOU=WE” Program in Łódź, Poland, 18-19 June 2011

This is a wonderful Programme because every step resonates with common sense rooted in deep spiritual truth. There is a lot of fun (and Fr Jay himself is part of what makes the course special) but it is also hard work and makes you put your marriage where it belongs in the centre of life. I found myself with a new focus on loving and making the most of the particular man I am married to rather than trying to measure up to some ideal. It was also good to realise how many of the pressures one faces in marriage are due to circumstances and are experienced by others - one doesn't have to take them all out on one's unfortunate spouse! It is easy, too, to focus on weaknesses, my own and my husband's. It was actually comforting to realise our strengths.

*Louise Kirk, UK Coordinator of Alive to the World PHSE programme,
Member of the Department of New Evangelization at the Diocese of Shrewsbury*

You can learn more about us at: <http://www.loveandlifeprograms.org>