A Spiritually-based Model for Working with Couples

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Permanence/Stability

ASSESSMENT
- Length of relationship/current concerns
- History of the relationship (positive vs. negative perception)
- Personal views of relational commitment
- Level of personal commitment (scale 1 to 10)
- Spiritual life of the individuals
- Personal commitment to Jesus and faith community
- What is the vision for the marriage (expectations)
- When/how did the couple become aware that they were to marry?

RISK FACTORS
- Family of origin issues
- Previous relational experiences (length, intensity, issues)
- Previous relational splits
- Parental relationships
- Lack of vision for the marriage (expectations)
- Lack of faith commitment

SKILLS
- Relationship formation
- Visioning

SPIRITUAL TASKS
- Cultivation of a sense of couple spirituality
- Understanding of covenantal relationship
- Review of individual spiritual life and commitment
- Detect/discuss faith differences

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS
- How secure do I feel in this relationship?
- How committed am I to this relationship?

SELF REVELATION

ASSESSMENT
- Past/present communication patterns
- Roles (initiator/avoider)
- Time issues
- Pattern of resolving conflicts/previous attempts to resolve conflict (process & outcome)
- Communication pattern
- Anger management
- “hot button” issues

RISK FACTORS
- Pattern of withdrawal and invalidation
- Tense problem solving pattern
- High degree of criticism
- Patterns of domestic violence

SKILLS
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Conflict management
- Anger management
- Forgiveness

SPIRITUAL TASKS
- Develop pattern of shared prayer and faith sharing
- Establish spiritual routines and disciplines
- Discuss coping with spiritual crisis and dark night of the soul

EVALUATIVE QUESTION
- Where are we in terms of our communication in our relationship?

MUTUALITY

ASSESSMENT
- Pattern of decision-making
- Time sharing patterns
- Importance of control to the individual
- Sharing of leisure/social interests
- Mutual friends
- Sense of partnership
- Ability to forgive and move beyond

RISK FACTORS
- Increased distancing
- Dominance issues
- Family of origin: pattern of mutuality between parents
- Isolation
- Lack of shared interests/friends
- Difficulty or inability to let go

SKILLS
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Conflict management
- Anger management
- Forgiveness
- Attitude of gratitude

SPIRITUAL TASKS
- Resolution of the Dark Night of the Soul
- Refocus of relationship on the spirituality of the couple in light of emerging/new roles
- Processing of relational and spiritual experiences and growth
- Living with increased trust in the relationship and the Trinity

EVALUATIVE QUESTION
- Do we have a relationship which reflects mutuality: a sense of partnership?
- What do we need to forgive and let go of in order to move forward in our relationship?

OTHER DIRECTEDNESS/ SERVICE

ASSESSMENT
- Able to recognize a broader definition/vision of family
- Movement towards a renewed sense of life mission beyond previous concerns
- Balancing act
- Involvement with the larger community

RISK FACTORS
- Isolation/closing in
- Either or orientation to relationships & life
- Self-centeredness

SKILLS
- Transitioning
- Balancing of responsibilities
- Forgiveness

SPIRITUAL TASKS
- Development of a couple theology of service
- Discern ways to serve
- Prepare for eternity
- Prepare for possible separation from spouse

EVALUATIVE QUESTION
- Where are we with regards to service to others?
- What are our current responsibilities towards family?

A framework that therapists and pastoral counselors can use to assess and intervene with couples in a way that recognizes the spiritual dimension of the relationship. The framework is Trinitarian and is focused upon four key characteristics associated with the Trinity and applies these characteristics to the marital relationship.

Rublev’s Icon of the Trinity