SmartLoving Marriage Seminar

Catering Plan & Budget

Hospitality is an important aspect of the SLM seminar. We want to eliminate any unnecessary distractions for the couples (such as a growling stomach!) and ensure their comfort. Moreover, research indicates that when blood sugar levels drop, people become irritable as their capacity to maintain serotonin levels in their brain is reduced.

We also want couples to feel valued and nurtured. Therefore, great care is taken to present the food and beverages professionally and on time. Planning the SLM seminar meals requires attentiveness to the budget, the quality of the food and the spirit of hospitality.

# Budget Considerations

The seminar fees must cover not only direct costs incurred on the weekend, but also contribute to ongoing costs such as administration, marketing, newsletters and development of other resources. In addition to the catering costs, there also other direct costs to cover, such as participant materials, hall hire and sometimes transport costs for presenters. In all, the seminar is only really possibly on the budget that we have with the generous contribution of volunteers to cook and/or give their time at the seminar in hospitality.

The following plan represents the collective wisdom of a number of couples who have hosted many SLM seminars in a variety in settings.

The budget, while tight, becomes easier to manage with larger numbers. Host couples of smaller seminars will not be expected to cover the costs of overruns, while large seminars should not use all the budget simply because it is there. Excess funds are always put to good use covering the shortfall in other areas.

# Quality of Food

A feature of all MRC events is the abundance of food. All food served should be of a substantial quality but gourmet extravagance should be avoided. Care should be taken to avoid wastage. When possible, left-overs should be stored for future SL events or consumed at home by the Team (buy the food/drinks that you like!). Some Team members offer to ‘buy back’ excess food & drinks and this is very helpful, especially if there is left-over (unopened) alcohol.

# Spirit of Hospitality

An essential part of the message of SL is that each and every couple’s marriage is important to the Church. We communicate that the Church is invested in their relationship not in words, but in our actions. The hospitality offered on the SLM seminar is thus a vital part of the process. Our goal is to ensure that the couples are physically comfortable, that they feel well cared for and nourished in both body and soul. A cheerful disposition and generous service tenderises the couples’ hearts making them more receptive to the challenges of the seminar.

When possible, past participants of SL and/or parishioners can be encouraged to contribute to the hospitality of the seminar. This may be through prayer, baking/cooking, serving meals or assisting with the clean-up.

Keeping these three aspects in balance is difficult. On the one hand we want to spoil the couples with generous hospitality and lavish abundance. On the other, budget constraints are very real and cannot be overlooked. When planning a seminar, keep in mind that the gift of donation is of vital importance, whether it be a donation of time, labour or food. It is a gift to the recipients but it is also a give to the donor; we receive so much ourselves when we gift our time and energies in love to another.

# Some things to Consider

1. The calculation of the quantities must include the Team (presenters, hosts, helpers, chaplain). So add the number of registered participants to the number of Team for total numbers. We don’t ask the Team to pay.
2. Other expenses such as purchase of equipment (glasses, table clothes, coffee makers etc) are on top of this and should be checked with the MRC office before first – when possible borrow these items from the parish or friends.
3. Saturday morning and afternoon teas should be ready in good time so that couples can take it with them to do their sharing.
4. Saturday lunch picnic bags: these can be prepacked offsite and should be ready by 1:15 so that couples can go immediately to a private space to continue sharing. Picnic bags are available from the MRC office if unable to be sourced locally. Bags are big enough for food for two. Suggested main dishes include:
	* Sandwiches/wraps packed into small lunch bags. (See below for filling suggestions)
	* Quiche (cold or warm) & Greek Salad packed in takeaway containers.
	* Salads (eg chicken Caesar, tuna pasta, Thai beef noodle) in takeaway containers.
5. Love Stories: We want to make the environment conducive to sharing stories in groups of 3-4 couples. If there are no tables available at Sunday lunch, arrange chairs in groups of 6. Allow couples to begin the storytelling then clear plates and bring dessert to them. Avoid dishes that are awkward to eat as a lap dish such as soup.
6. Resist having large numbers of helpers present at the one time – this avoids the helpers becoming too rowdy and distracting the participants. If you have a strong network that enjoys hosting, have them host a dinner a month after the seminar to welcome new couples to the community.
7. Special diets. It can be difficult to cater for a gluten free or allergy-restricted participant – ask them for advice and if necessary pick up a prepared/frozen meal for lunches.