SmartLoving Marriage

Seminar Hospitality

Hospitality is a key charism of marriage and an important dynamic in SmartLoving. Hospitality is about making people feel welcome and valued, and is relevant, not just during the seminar itself, but also during the inquiry period before hand, and in the months afterwards when the challenges of sustaining the new lifestyle are most intense.

A Mentality of Service

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:12-15)

The charism of hospitality is grounded in a mentality of service as modelled by Jesus. It is a practical expression of our couple love requiring our time, energy or attention. At times, it will inconvenience us or even require personal sacrifice. Yet God, never to be outdone in generosity, always rewards those who give in love to others.

To be effective in the SL mission to nurture the relationships of other couples, our gestures of hospitality need to be supported by a spirit of Christian humility. It is a tremendous privilege to be part of a couple’s journey of love, especially when significant growth and healing is taking place, such as during the SLM seminar. The presence of caring couples at these times, representative of the Church community and providing for the physical needs and comfort of participants, greatly facilitates the process of growth.

Individuals and singles are a wonderful resource in providing hospitality during the seminar. However, being present as a couple brings the added benefit of witness and the camaraderie of shared experience. Whenever possible, couples should mix and converse as a couple with participants, so that their sacramental witness can be most evident.

## The Hospitality Team

The work of hospitality is so significant to the success of SL, that each seminar has a host dedicated to coordinating the support team. This Host Couple/Person are responsible for venue management, organising prayer couples and billeting, sourcing the meals and rostering helpers.

The most obvious task of the Hospitality Team is to prepare and serve the meals during the seminar. Great care is taken to provide an appetising menu with attention to special dietary requirements. More important than the quality of the food (which always receives very positive comments), is the atmosphere that is created through the combination of good humour, prayer, and community among the hospitality team.

## Invitations and Inquiry

With imagination, there are many opportunities to enthuse about marriage and promote the seminar to suitable couples. A number of participants have come via a hairdresser who shares her SL experiences with her clients. Others have learnt about SL during school canteen duty. Sometimes, acquaintances or casual friends are more open than close friends and family members. Offering to care for your friends’ children or to pay for the seminar, is a wonderful way to demonstrate the seriousness of your enthusiasm for the SL experience.

## During the Seminar

Welcoming couples as they arrive sets the tone of the seminar and creates important first impressions. Usually one couple meets participants in the car park or at the door to direct them, and others assist with registration, refreshments, and introductions to other couples present. Refreshment and meal breaks are opportunities to engage participants in conversation. Often they are looking to comment on a session or share something of their experience. If serious concerns arise of a counselling nature, refer them to the team leaders.

## Prayer Sponsors

SL is dependent upon prayer for its success. The agenda is so counter cultural, calling for mutual self-donation between husband and wife, that without prayer and the support of the other SL couples, it’s message would not be heard and would be impossible to live. Participating couples are told that there is a prayer sponsor praying for them at the beginning of the seminar, and the letter of support is given to them at the closing. This letter is a concrete gesture of the church’s support, and is very influential in communicating the importance of the couple’s relationship to the Church community. For their part, prayer sponsors undertake to pray for their participating couple in whatever way works best for them - offering Mass, fasting, saying the Rosary, remembering them at grace before meals etc.

## After the Seminar

Hospitality continues after the seminar in a spirit of ongoing care and is extended not only to new couples, but also to our SL contemporaries. Whenever possible, a phone call or letter of encouragement to the new SL couple is a support in as they attempt to incorporate the spiritual exercises (Prayer for Passion and Skin to Skin) into their daily lives. Gatherings, even if attended only occasionally, are a valuable help in maintaining our growth in intimacy. Held in a SL couple’s home, their hospitality is the foundation of the effectiveness of the gatherings and is the domestic church in action. Annual renewal events and newsletters also assist couples to continue the development of their relationship.