I am someone who has been involved in pastoral activities in this diocese for quite some time. I started as a youth activist in the late 70s and got deeply involved in organizing the youth in pastoral activities from the parish level, through diocesan and to the national level, rising to become the National Secretary of IMCS – Pax Romana and the National Treasurer of the Ghana National Catholic Youth Council (GHANCYC) until I got married in 1984.

My marriage did not stop me from the pastoral activities; they rather got intensified as I took over as the Kumasi Diocesan Youth Coordinator, without salary, when the incumbent, Mr. D.S.O. Annan, who was my best man, left for further course abroad. I was a teacher at Kumasi Polytechnic and I ran this office alongside. At the diocesan youth office at the Cathedral, due to proximity with the other offices, I became so close to colleagues heading the other offices to the point that we planned our outreach programmes together. Tony Osei Assibey was in charge of the Communications Office, Dave Anane Druyeh for Laity Council, Steve Gerrar for Non-Catholic Schools Chaplaincy and Yaw Afoakwa, now bishop of Obuasi, for the Catechetical Office. For some number of years, we spent weekends together in our outreach programmes in the rural areas. Tony had robust vehicle for the terrain, a Nissan Patrol, and we will all jump into it. He will get the people attracted first with religious movies on a giant screen, and the rest of us will take advantage to communicate our messages.

The task was daunting but the *esprit de corps* kept us stronger. I had two children and a wife, but as you can understand, God first in everything. Contrary to my expectation, I observed my children moved away from me and ran towards their mother, anytime I entered my home. My wife will complain about my absence from home most of the time but obviously I had good explanation for her. “Onyame adwuma na hwe, na wodee akoso”.

I am sure by now some of you are beginning to ask, “Where is this speaker taking us to?” “What is he supposed to talk about?”

My dear people of God, I am not here to play my CV or curriculum vitae. I want you to learn from this testimony. It may help you to meet God’s expectations of you as a married Christian.

My dear people of God, while this trend was going on, the then Apostolic Pro-Nuncio, Most Rev. Ivan Dias, visited the diocese. He met the leadership of the Charismatic Renewal at the St. Peter’s Social Centre. I was there since I was a strong member and a leader. What took place starred into my face directly. I felt myself, as John Tandoh, being talked to by Most Rev. Ivan Dias. The Apostolic Pro-Nuncio interrupted his speech and asked all of us to do an exercise for him. What was it? He listed three major activities we are involved in on a daily basis and asked us to put them in order of priority in life. *Your job, your family, your pastoral activities.*

Dear people of God, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio told us that none of us in the room got it right. He then arranged the right order for us. To our surprise, “your family” came first; then “your job”, and then “your pastoral activities”. We were surprised because, he being the man of God should not relegate the work of God to the background, we thought. And I am sure many of you listening to me will equally be surprised at this. But that is what it should be in life, if we have to
have a healthy marriage and family life. Perhaps this could also explain why our priests do not marry.

My dear people of God, since I have a lot to share with you, and I know myself to be a talkative when it comes to marriage, permit me to continue reading my thoughts, so I am not caught by time. I am not comfortable when I have to talk about marriage in the middle of the Holy Mass.

Most Rev. Ivan Dias’ exercise, his response, subsequent explanation and advice, marked a turning point in my marital life. Immediately, I started working to secure a healthy work-life balance. It took some time, but it has paid off.

My dear people of God, the organisers of this year’s women’s week have asked me to speak on a topic of my choice on marriage. I have chosen to speak on “The importance of a passionate healthy marriage” as a befitting topic this evening. I intend to remind all married Catholics but particularly, Catholic wives, of how important their calling to marriage is in the eyes of the Lord and how a very healthy marriage can advance the course of God’s Kingdom.

Back to the exercise of Most Rev. Ivan Dias, I want to refer to “our job” and “our involvement in pastoral ministry” as stressors, if we have to give priority to the right maintenance of our family, as married Catholics. And I will first speak on “our job” as Stressor number 1.

Career woman, loving wife

A working wife must walk the extra mile to achieve a healthy balance between work and family.

A WOMAN LIVING in a city today is usually unwilling to be just a homemaker. Her ideal is to have both a successful career and a happy family. But she may not be prepared for how her work could affect her spousal relationship.

Life will be tough and unhappy if a working wife - even if she is successful in her career - does not have the support of her husband and children. It will be worse if she has a problem with her in-laws.

Walk the extra mile

The demands of career and family require that a working woman have the right attitude and skills and be ready to walk the extra mile to keep a healthy balance.

More is required of a wife and mother than of a husband and father. The issue of fairness does not arise. It is simply because women are more gifted in giving love and tenderness while performing multiple tasks. It is a love that they are more capable of offering than men.

Foremost, a woman should not mix up her office and home roles. No matter how successful she is at work or how illustrious her title, back home she is always the wife to her husband, the mother to her children and the daughter-in-law to her husband's parents.
She is expected to behave differently at home. For instance, to be effective at work, she may have to be tough to her subordinates and speak firmly to them. However, she should not speak in the same way to her husband and other members of her family. Nobody likes to be told what to do, especially a husband.

A wife should be even more sensitive when she is perceived to be doing better career-wise than her husband. Sometimes, even an innocent comment that unwittingly implies he is inferior could seriously injure his ego. This potential over-reaction is a weakness of many men and it is something a good wife should learn to understand.

The higher a wife climbs in the corporate world, the more understanding of her husband she needs to be. Once home, a wise woman would stop being the no-nonsense iron lady and become a gentle loving wife. This will reassure the husband and prevent him from feeling threatened.

When a husband is emotionally secure and feels loved and respected, he is more able to accept and even gladly support his wife's successful career. On the other hand, a husband who truly loves his wife should not be envious that she is doing well at work. In fact, he can learn to treat his wife's achievement as his own and always be there to encourage and support her.

When both parties can mutually support each other, they can have a happy spousal relationship.

**Tender loving care**

A career woman in a competitive environment usually puts in lots of energy and effort in her job to survive. If at home she faces a husband with a similar experience, what can she do to reduce their stress? How can she create an atmosphere where they can enjoy their lives outside work?

These questions require answers more from women than men, because women are somehow more gifted in enhancing the family atmosphere and in building relationships. If her husband cooperates with her initiative, they can build a loving relationship in spite of their heavy job commitments.

A wife should do her best to satisfy the emotional needs of her husband. Emotions play a pivotal role in married life. No matter how busy she is, she should not ignore his needs. When the husband is troubled at work or frustrated, his wife can support him by saying encouraging words or hugging him lovingly or holding his hands gently.

Simple gestures can bring a deep satisfaction that comes from knowing that someone is always there for him. These actions will certainly strengthen the spousal bond.

A career woman has a tight schedule and a heavy workload. It is thus unrealistic to expect her to give the same amount of time and attention to her husband as a homemaker could.

However, it is not the length of time but the quality of time and the timing that matter. At critical moments when the husband is most in need of her, a woman must give him the full support and love.
How do you identify the crucial moments? Knowing the husband's needs helps. For example: One man may behave like a kid when he is sick or in pain in the hope of getting the full attention of his wife. Another may like to go for nature walks. Yet another enjoys bringing the family for a sumptuous meal or attaches great importance to certain dates like birthdays and anniversaries.

These needs are usually unspoken but with keen observation and a little sensitivity, they are not difficult to uncover. Women are gifted with such ability. With this knowledge, a working wife can arrange her work and time in such a way that she can be both an effective worker and a loving wife.

The smart career wife can also maximise results by doing things that don't take up a lot of time but can contribute considerably to maintaining a loving relationship with her husband.

For example: She cares for her husband when he is sick; sends him to the airport to catch his plane; exchanges intimate emails, or telephones him to express her love; supports and encourages him when he encounters difficulties; takes care of household chores, like ensuring the supply of household necessities.

These little gestures express the love and care of a wife and they will not go unappreciated.

**Be a good mother**

Many working women feel guilty because they can't spend more time with their children. It is worse if their children encounter learning difficulties or develop certain character flaws. Others, including their husbands, may accuse them of being the cause of their children's problems. Although this isn't fair, it happens often enough.

To overcome these difficulties, women should treat motherhood as a sacred duty and make their children top priority, second only to their marital relationship. A woman may not have lots of time to spend with her children, but she must ensure that they do not feel lonely and distant and think that their mother doesn't care.

When the children feel loved by their mother, the husband will also feel comforted and satisfied. If a woman is a good mother, she is indeed a good wife.

I am confident that women are more capable of generous and sacrificial love. That's why my thoughts focus mainly on what a working wife should do to ensure that her family will still be happy despite her spending less time at home.

However the lesson applies to a working husband too. He must also put in his share to make their relationship work. Married life has to be nourished by both husband and wife.

**Stressor Number 2: Church Activities**

Is your involvement in Church activities killing your marriage? If you are a married Catholic and are seriously involved in group apostolate, THANK YOU for your commitment to love
and serve people; and to advance God’s kingdom. My desire in speaking to you this evening is to invite you to invest some time and prayer reviewing your marriage.

Truth-be-told, the marriage problems and statistics of estranged spouses within church and para-church ministries are discouraging. You and I occasionally meet very Christian husbands and wives (many who are leaders and very committed to pastoral activities) whose marriages are in deep weeds. We remind them that the Bible says that “every marriage will experience trouble” (1 Corinthians 7:28). We encourage couples to resist any shame that is often connected to marriage troubles. And with God as the main character in a couple’s story, we challenge couples to view marriage troubles as opportunities rather than obstacles. Is that all?

How many women do you know who are serving in the church, in the singing ministry, on the children liturgy team, in the teaching ministry, on the church management team, in the prayer ministry, in the women ministry, in the youth ministry — doing mighty kingdom work for the Lord—all while neglecting their husbands, who are at home waiting to make love? Yes, make love—the anomaly of countless marriages.

I know of several women who epitomize this kind of lifestyle. With all the passion and zeal they have inside them, they allow ministry to be the purpose they long for while their marriage is simply an added byproduct. Enhancing passion in their marriage is not a concern they have. Some have the thoughts, I'm married, I have four children—passion is a misleading invention created on television.

Their surmise, however, is completely out of line with God. And unfortunately, a lot of marriages today represent that same thinking: sex is a formality rather than a sacred union between man and woman, and this mindset creates nothing more than a methodical presence.

The Song of Songs is a gentle reminder of pure romantic wedded love. It's almost hard to read the book of Songs without feeling as if you're imposing on two people madly in love. God wants us to know that while he calls married couples to be fruitful and multiply, planning children is not the only reason a couple should be making love, and women in ministry are obligated to be well-versed in the biblical example of passion in marriage.

It's easy to assume dividing your time between several ministries is putting God first, but that's actually a false reality. Putting God first means to be in agreement with his alliance by doing all you can to ignite a passionate flame in your marriage. Your husband and your home are often neglected as you spend all your time at church and prayer camps, and God will never ask you to disregard your home for any reason.

God is first in our lives. Our families—or better yet, our husbands—come second. Then extracurricular activities, jobs, pastoral ministry work, and so on. When things fall in this order, we will see God move in many areas on our behalf.

We cannot effectively lead any ministry if we do not believe marriage is the second-highest priority in our lives, and I do not mean marriage coupled with children; I mean marriage, to our husbands. The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 3:5, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” (NIV). The importance of a passionate healthy marriage is essential to women in leadership as more and more marriages in the church suffer a fate not designed by God. Perpetuating an already existing epidemic within women's
ministry causes a mockery of God's Word.

My dear people of God, here is a very touching testimony a woman gave as she approached me after a laity week talk I gave at the Basilica, some time last year. She is still a leader in the Charismatic Renewal. I have paraphrased it as follows:

“I considered my husband a nuisance when it came to making love, and I found myself in the midst of other women in leadership who were often complaining about their husbands' annoyances. These women seemed unhappy in their marriages and I did not want to join their company. I did not want to think of my husband as a nuisance for wanting to make love; instead, I wanted to adore and dote on him and enjoy his love for me. I wanted to be exactly what he desired, because sex life was marring our marriage.

“I went to God and asked him to help me change my marriage, and God answered when you were at one of our prayer meetings to talk about the married Christian and sex life. I remember a statement you made that we cannot take our sex life for granted and that we must pray that our husbands never lose their desire for us.

“I finally understood that God wants all marriages to have passion, and I wanted nothing more than to honour God and my husband. It took me an effort to initiate steps at correcting the situation. I was excited to transform our marriage into something beautiful. I first learned that in order for couples to have great passion, they first need good communication. My husband and I spoke words to one another all the time, but we did not spend a lot of time talking intimately together about our pains, our worries, and our happiness. With my encouragement, we started doing devotions together. I now responded positively to his invitation for outings. I began praying daily for his dreams to come true, his perfect health, integrity that his children could admire, that he would desire only me, that he would be obedient to the Word of God.

The next thing I began to do was pray for our sex life like never before. I began to pray in our room when I knew it was "one of those nights." I began praying to myself by inviting the Holy Spirit in while we were making love. My husband had no idea what came over me. I was a totally different person. We were no longer going through the motions—just doing it because he wanted to—and instead, we were both enjoying what God ordained in marriage. My husband was so appreciative that I cared enough about him and our marriage that I sought God to enhance our passion.

The self-worth I thought my ministry in the Charismatic Renewal gave me now comes from my passionate, healthy marriage to the husband I once thought a nuisance. Our once "okay" sex life is now exciting and fun. My once-stalled involvement in the ministry is moving again as my husband now comes with me to prayer meetings.”

My dear people of God, just because something is not a problem in our marriage today, does not mean it won't become a problem in the future. In other words, if lack of sex and passion are not a problem with your husband now, that does not mean it won't become a problem in the future. It may be simmering. Be wise.

Certainly it is a top priority for women in pastoral activities to “seek first the kingdom of God.” However, I believe an important, and often overlooked, part of advancing God’s
kingdom is to make marriage a high priority.

**Moving Ahead**

Marriage is a sacred union between man and woman, ordained by God, and consecration will only release God's supernatural power in your marriage and ministry. Marriages will face many trials and tribulations; however, a couple committed to the sacrifice will exemplify the inherent discipline Jesus taught by living together in selfless humility. Our husbands are men created in God's own image, and if they follow Christ, they are perfect in the eyes of the Lord. They will fall and they will stumble, but that cannot be an excuse to hold up a barrier creating distance in the marriage. A couple committed to daily prayer for their marriage will break down those barriers and the Holy Spirit will move in areas that were once depleted.

Remember, *in the beginning* … when God created humankind, He created a man and a woman. And He commanded them to “become one flesh” and reproduce—to expand community. Healthy marriages positively impact healthy families, and healthy families positively impact healthy churches and ministries. Marriage has amazing potential to expand community—and to advance God’s kingdom.

**If you are a married Catholic woman, I would like to offer for your consideration a number of questions about your marriage.**

Do you regularly pray for your marriage? In what specific ways are you loving, serving, and celebrating your spouse? Are you wholeheartedly—emotionally, physically, sexually—living out the exclusivity and permanence, the “until death do us part” components within marriage covenant? Are you passionately living out the miracle of “two becoming one” and shamelessly walking out your marriage—“naked without shame”? (Remember Gen 2:24 & 25). If so, in what ways?

God has a plan for you in his kingdom, and that plan includes your husband walking beside you. Remind yourself daily that you are an amazing woman of God and your value as a daughter comes from God and not activities. Remind yourself of the wonderful man God blessed you with. Remind yourself of the love and patience your husband has given you. Remind yourself that with God at the center of your marriage, it can only be astounding, extravagant, and incredible. So call the sitter, have a date, light a few candles, and have a boisterous, passionate night tonight!

Thank you.