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Catholic Blessings - Prayers for Everyday Life*

Catholic Wedding Checklist
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planning, budget

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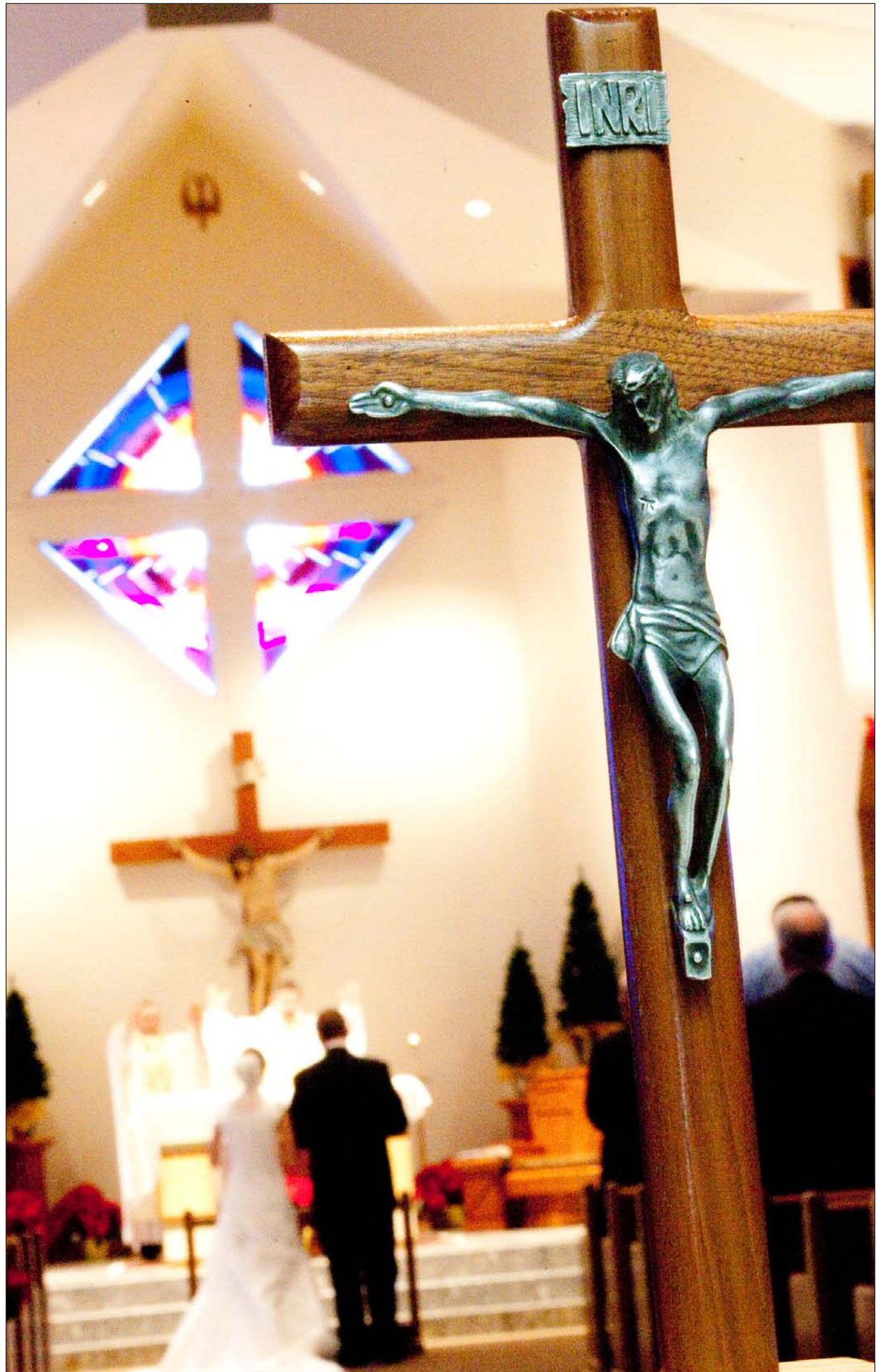
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A Catholic wedding checklist

BY KAY COZAD

You're engaged and it's time to map out a plan for what will be the start of a new life of marital love for you and your spouse. To create a meaningful Catholic wedding it is important to remember that the celebration of marriage is not just a ceremony, but a sacrament. The elements of the ceremony you choose will speak to those in attendance of your values and hopes for your marriage.

The informative website, www.foryourmarriage.org, offered by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), presents a plethora of information on Church teachings concerning the sacrament of Marriage and all that it entails.

It states, "In the Catholic Church, Marriage is a sacrament. All sacraments are to be celebrated because they are encounters with Jesus Christ. A wedding celebrates Christ's gift of marital love to this particular man and woman. It is a time for rejoicing."

The following are general guidelines for planning a memorable Catholic wedding compiled from information found at www.foryourmarriage.org, www.theknot.com and www.ehow.com.

Twelve months prior to the wedding

- Select a church. Some parishes require one member of the couple to be a registered member.
- Meet with the pastor or deacon to select a wedding date and time, and discuss the parish requirements for a wedding celebration. Many parishes have wardrobe restrictions, including requiring the bride to cover her shoulders during the wedding.
- Choose one of three Rites of



Marriage to celebrate: Wedding celebration within a Mass for two Catholics; celebration without Mass, structured around the Liturgy of the Word when a Catholic marries a baptized Christian; and celebration without Mass when a Catholic marries a non-Christian.

Nine months prior to the wedding

- Select readings (traditionally, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and one from the Gospels) and

Prayers of the Faithful from the approved texts.

- Select family members or friends who will be lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and those who will carry the offertory gifts if Mass will be celebrated.
- Meet with parish music director to select sacred music that will be used at the Mass or ceremony.
- Select the bridal party, who will not only be attendants but witnesses of the marriage rite as well. Traditionally, the Church prefers the maid of honor and best man to be Catholic.

- Discuss dates to attend pre-marital classes or a preparation program required by the Church and engagement retreats hosted by the Office of Family Life.

Six months prior to the wedding

- Design or select, and order, wedding invitations to be sent to guests.
- Create your guest list.

Three months prior to the wedding

- Meet with the parish wedding representative or pastor to discuss decoration requirements, which may include placement and size of floral arrangements.
- Discuss seating arrangements for family members.

Two months prior to the wedding

- Finalize the invitations, ceremony details and vows.
- Publish a wedding announcement in the local newspaper and the church bulletin.
- Book a location for the rehearsal dinner.
- Prepare and mail wedding invitations.

Three to four weeks prior to the wedding

- Meet with the parish priest or deacon to discuss last minute details.
- Send rehearsal dinner invitations, if appropriate.

One to two weeks before the wedding

- Touch base with your priest.

Day before the wedding

- Participate, with the priest and wedding party, in a rehearsal ceremony.
- Pray!

A note about budgets

Developing a realistic budget for your wedding may seem a daunting task. Costs vary between regions but according to www.costofwedding.com "the majority of couples spend between \$19,907 and \$33,178" on weddings in the U.S.

From the wedding dress to the reception decorations and entertainment, wedding costs can add up quickly. But a little research and careful planning can help keep costs to a minimum.

According to the USCCB sponsored website www.foryourmarriage.org, the U.S. bishops have not specifically addressed the issue of spending, but put forth a few questions for couples to answer to keep costs in perspective. Answer the following questions to shape a personal view of what is truly important in a wedding celebration.

- What do you want the wedding to say about you and your values?
- Are you willing to go into debt, or put family members in debt, because of this wedding?
- Are you willing to focus time and energy on the details of a lavish wedding? Will this reduce the attention you can pay to preparing for the marriage itself?
- Do you feel comfortable with the amount you plan to spend? Have you considered this in relation to the needs of people in your community?

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Husbands and wives: The power of praying together

BY FRED AND LISA EVERETT

Christian Marriage is a special sanctuary of the Lord's presence. As a couple, we can deepen our awareness of Christ's dwelling among us and draw on its power by developing a regular prayer life together. Picture yourselves as the two disciples whom Christ approaches on the road to Emmaus. You are going on your way, making the journey of your married life together, and He wants to walk along with you.

"What are you discussing as you go on your way?" he asks. "What are your hopes, your dreams, your difficulties, your worries, as you make your way along this journey to which I have called you?"

The disciples on the road to Emmaus confided in Christ, and He enlightened them on the meaning of the Scriptures, consoled them in their suffering and set their hearts on fire. So He will do this with us, if we open our hearts to Him in prayer.

Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote that communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion bestowed by the sacrament of Matrimony. Like the two disciples along the road to Emmaus, a Christian husband and wife who invite Christ to stay and walk with them, day by day, will experience His presence in marvelous ways. They will discover that as they draw closer to Christ, He will deepen their love for one another.

Perhaps this is why studies have shown that couples who make shared prayer a regular part of their life together have stronger marriages than those who

simply attend church services together.

Now, if you are like many husbands and wives, the thought of praying together, just the two of you, makes you somewhat uncomfortable.

Perhaps you have even given it a try and it seemed awkward or strained.

Here are some suggestions drawn from the experience of other married couples that you might find helpful. Begin with a few moments of silence together to become attentive to the presence of God.

Simply holding hands and slowly praying aloud the Our Father is a good way to get started. Doing this reminds us that besides being spouses, we are, above all, brother and sister in Christ, children of the same Father, in whose house we hope to spend eternity together. Is there any goal more important in our Marriage?

Magnificat is a monthly mis-sallete-sized magazine that is a wonderful resource to rely on for praying together on a regular basis. For each day of the month it contains morning and evening prayer, the readings for the Mass of the day, a reflection from a saint or spiritual writer and much more.

Try praying morning or evening prayer together as a couple, or perhaps read aloud the Gospel of the day and spend a few minutes meditating on it, asking the Lord to show you what it means for your life and sharing with each other any insights you receive. Subscribe to *Magnificat* by calling (866) 273-5215 or through their website at www.magnificat.net.

Some religious bookstores in the diocese also sell current



issues of *Magnificat*, and some pastors order bulk subscriptions and make them available to parishioners.

"Prayers for Married Couples" by Renee Bartkowski is another helpful aid. It contains over 75 prayers covering all sorts of circumstances that come up in marriage, such as "Don't let us become bookkeepers," "We

had a good day," "Coping with our worries," and "We have a problem we can't handle." It is available through Liguori Publications, (800) 325-9521 or www.liguori.org.

Consider praying the Divine Mercy chaplet or a decade of the rosary aloud for a particular intention. Don't feel that you have to confine yourselves to the

traditional mysteries, but try picking an event or an encounter in the life of Christ that seems most relevant to what is on your minds and hearts.

Parents praying together are powerful intercessors for their children, and, as we read in Lamentations, we should confide to Christ all of our dreams and difficulties in trying to raise them as His sons and daughters: "Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord; Lift up your hands to Him for the lives of your little ones."

Sometimes we will hear the Lord speaking in our hearts in a subtle inspiration or sudden insight. Sometimes something our spouse will say will strike us as a message from the Lord.

Sometimes we will share with Christ a problem we are having or a decision we need to make and ask Him to give us guidance through the Scriptures. And when we open the Bible and begin to read, we will be amazed by how much a particular passage speaks to our situation.

Whichever form of prayer appeals to you as a couple, give it a go and persevere. You won't regret this simple investment in your relationship with Christ and with each other that will reap incredible dividends in this world and the next.

Fred and Lisa Everett are the co-directors of the Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

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Fostering communication and intimacy in the first years of Marriage

BY LISA EVERETT

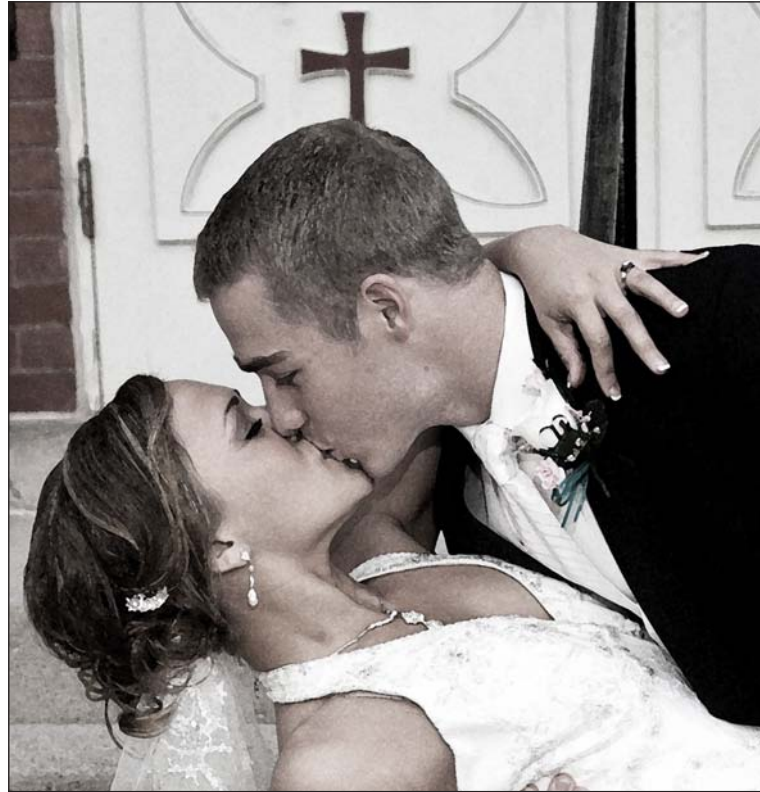
1. Deepen your relationship with Christ and make Him a real partner in your marriage.

Never forget the fact that Christ performed His first miracle at a wedding feast! This shows how highly He values the love between man and woman in marriage and wants to grace it with His presence.

When two baptized Christians come before the altar to be married, we not only make promises to one another — Christ makes a promise to us. Like a faithful friend, He promises to be with us for better and for worse, in good times and in bad, when our cup is overflowing and when the wine is running out.

Remember Christ's encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Christ approached them and asked them what they were discussing as they went on their way, and they poured out their hearts to Him. Now imagine those two disciples as a husband and wife, traveling on their life's journey, a journey that Christ has joined.

"What are you discussing as you go on your way?" He asks. Letting Christ be part of our conversations as husband and wife is another word for "prayer." We tell Him our hopes and dreams, our difficulties and struggles, our needs and our delights in our life together, and we listen to His word, whether that word comes



to us in a passage from Scripture or in the silence of our hearts.

But like the good friend that He is, Christ does not force Himself on us. Although He always takes the initiative to accompany us on the journey of our married life together, He wants to be invited to stay. Recall that when night had fallen on the road to Emmaus and the two disciples were ready to stop, Christ made as if He were going on. "Stay with us!" the pair entreated Him, and He remained with them and they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread.

When we invite Christ to stay

with us — making time to talk to Him and listen to Him in prayer, meeting Him in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance — we will experience His presence in marvelous ways in our married lives.

This is not ivory tower idealism disconnected from reality. Studies show that married couples who attend church services regularly have stronger marriages and are less likely to divorce than those who do not do so. These studies further show that couples who make shared prayer a regular part of their life together have even stronger marriages.

2. Commit to investing significant time and effort in making your marriage great.

Marriage calls for a complete gift of self between husband and wife. So a successful marriage cannot be a 50-50 proposition, where each spouse seeks to live out only his or her half of the bargain. Each spouse needs to strive to give 100 percent to the other, to make the complete gift of self they pledged on the altar a reality in daily life.

This means that we have to expect to work hard to make our marriage a success. Accustomed as we are in our culture to fast food, instant cash and TV remotes, many of us enter marriage with an expectation of instant gratification in our relationship with each other.

But building a real relationship takes work and it takes time. In marriage, as in the family life that flows from it, we need to make quantities of quality time for each other. This means, among other things, making a commitment to limit time spent in front of the TV and on the Internet, because these activities, pleasurable as they are, can consume huge quantities of time that should be spent with our spouse.

After attending alone a talk on married love at her local parish, one wife was heard to lament: "If my husband spent half as much time with me as he does on the Internet, I'd be a happy woman." Begin early in your marriage to give each other the first fruits of your days and nights, rather than the crumbs of time leftover from the multimedia feast.

3. Appreciate your differences and make them enrich your marriage.

St. Augustine once said of the moral life of believers: "In what is necessary, unity. In what is dubious, liberty; and in everything, charity."

This is a good maxim to put into practice in marriage, especially in the early years. While it is essential that a husband and wife share the same vision of marriage as a complete gift of self for life that is open to children, there are many legitimate and even delightful differences that a husband and wife bring to their new life together.

Discuss what gifts each of you bring to your marriage, beginning with your masculinity and femininity, and go on to look at your talents and temperaments, your interests and abilities. Try to see how they can complement each other rather than cause conflict between you, and how you can best put these different gifts at the service of each other and eventually, your children.

4. Establish your identity as a couple, building on the best from both of your backgrounds.

It is crucial that during the first few years of marriage, a husband and wife cement their identity as a couple. This means that, while all of us are part of a wider circle of family and friends, when we marry, our relationship with our spouse takes precedence.

It also means that, while the


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opinions and advice of relatives, especially those of parents, should receive a respectful hearing, it should ultimately be the couple themselves who discuss things openly and make decisions.

This is also the time to reflect on what gifts each of you has been given from your own background — family traditions and ethnic customs, special ways of celebrating holidays, styles of communicating, expressions of faith, prayer and service, etc. — and incorporate the best of both “worlds” into your own married life and one day pass on to your children.

5. Communicate regularly with honesty and kindness.

It may surprise some newlyweds to know that research has shown that 93 percent of communication in marriage is non-verbal. Over half of this nonverbal communication consists of body language, especially facial expressions, and almost half consists of tone of voice.

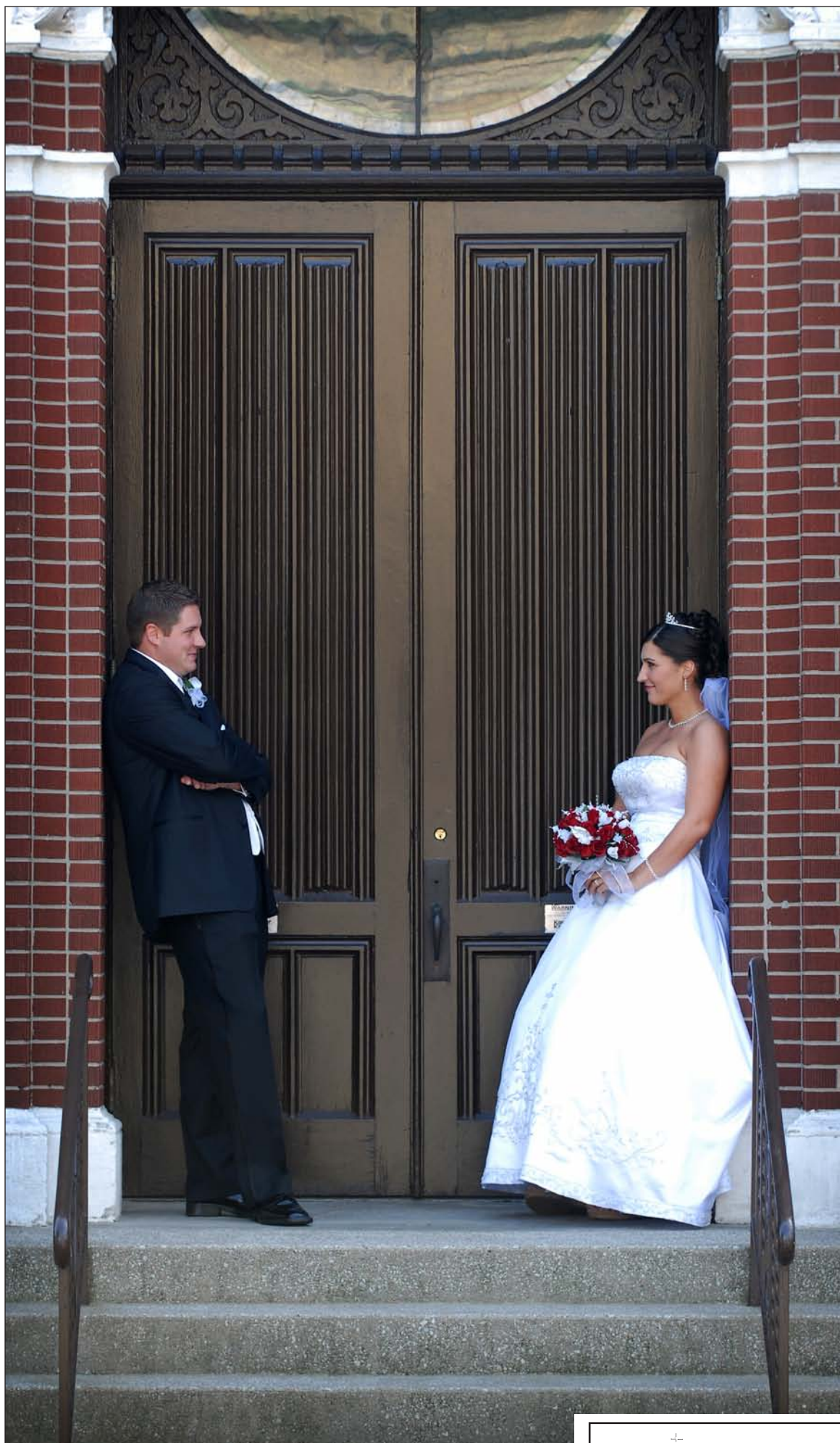
This means that we can say a lot to our spouse, for better or worse, without even opening our mouths.

But we also need to make time to converse with each other — every day to catch up and chat, and on a regular basis for more lengthy, serious discussion on topics that are important for our marriage. Especially in the latter context, it is important to cultivate an attitude of openness and receptivity to what my spouse is saying or sharing with me, including non-verbal cues.

I must also be willing to share with my spouse, in a loving manner, what is truly on my mind and heart. It is good to begin a habit in the first years of marriage of trying to include in our communication with one another each of the elements traditionally used in prayer with God: praise, thanks, asking for forgiveness and asking for what we need. If these things form the substance of our conversation with God, it stands to reason that they also will nurture our communication our spouse.

6. Learn how to resolve arguments constructively.

Communication between a husband and wife will occasion-



ally develop into an argument, perhaps involving an angry confrontation. Keeping in mind the acronym H.A.L.T. will help minimize “escalation”: never have a serious discussion when either of you is Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired or strapped for Time.

When disagreements do arise, make sure to stay focused on the issue at hand; don’t bring up other problems or reopen old discussions. Refrain from making accusations about each other’s motives and limit yourselves to discussing specific behaviors or actions that are bothering you.

Avoid using emotional exaggerations like “always” and “never” and absolutely forego making personal attacks, whether emotional or physical. Even in the heat of emotion, make a commitment to let your words be tools with which to build rather than weapons with which to wound.

Invite Christ into your conversation and ask Him to show you what course of action best serves the common good, regardless of who “wins.”

7. Make sure your emotional “deposits” far exceed your “withdrawals”

Christian psychologist Gary Smalley uses an analogy from banking to illustrate how to build emotional intimacy in marriage. Just as couples make deposits and withdrawals of money in their bank account, they also make deposits and withdrawals in each other’s emotional tank.

A deposit often involves something done with or for my spouse, acts of self-giving, sacrifices made, putting the other person first, deferring to my spouse’s personal preferences, etc. A withdrawal, on the other hand, is anything that offends the dignity of my spouse — a harsh word, an unkept promise, a selfish decision.

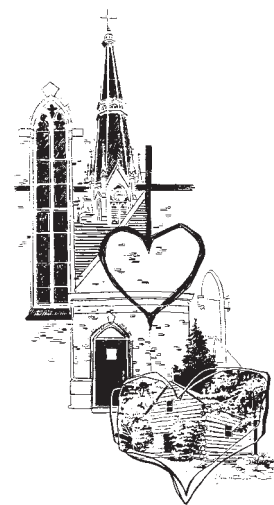
Research has shown that in loving, long-lasting marriages, there is a ratio of five “deposits” for every “withdrawal.” So make sure that your marriage gets off of the right foot in the first few years by starting an emotional “savings account” in which your acts of loving kindness to each other gain interest.



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FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED

FAQ: What is the symbolism of the rings?

Office of Worship: As proclaimed by the bride and groom within the actual Marriage rite, the rings symbolize “love and fidelity.” Gold bands call to mind permanence, purity and beauty within the sacramental union. Moreover, they are given from one spouse to another, attesting to the total gift of self in matrimony.

FAQ: Whatever happened to the unity candle?

Office of Worship: Beyond the fact that they are not part of the Marriage rites, “unity candles” are inappropriate for wedding Masses because they draw the connection and focus away from the true source and symbol of unity, the Holy Eucharist, from which the sacrament of Marriage flows. The vows and the declaration of consent, coupled with the sacramentals that are the rings, are what publicly and powerfully convey the real union of the spouses in a Catholic wedding. Lighting an extra candle that gets blown out at the end of Mass is really not the best symbol of covenantal permanence.

FAQ: Can we have “our song” in the wedding? It’s a pop song.

Office of Worship: The wedding is a sacred event, and the music must reflect this fact. Secular music does not belong before, during, or after the rite within the sacred place of the church. Favorite secular or popular songs of the couple belong at the reception or at another time during the wedding festivities that is not associated with the liturgy itself.

FAQ: Should the witnesses be Catholic, at least the best man and maid of honor?

Office of Worship: Strictly speaking, while it would probably be preferable to have Catholic witnesses, the witnesses function primarily to attest that the Marriage was celebrated. Therefore, they need not be Catholic. However, the authorized witness who officiates must be a priest or deacon.

FAQ: My fiancé is not Catholic. Should we have a Mass?

Office of Worship: A nuptial Mass is obviously the ideal, though it is sometimes the case that it would be better to highlight the unity of the couple rather than the differences. If the couple had a Mass, one partner would not be able to receive the Holy Eucharist since he or she would not be

Catholic, and, most likely, most of the non-Catholic’s family would not be Catholic. Therefore, it might sometimes be sensible for the couple to have the Rite of Marriage outside of Mass.

FAQ: My fiancé is not Catholic and wants to marry in her church. How would the Church recognize the Marriage? What can we do for the Church to recognize the sacramentality of the Marriage?

Office of Worship: Answers to such questions about Marriage outside the Church can be very complex. The most basic requirement to ensure validity in this situation is for the diocese, through the bishop’s authority, to give a dispensation both to marry a non-Catholic and to marry outside the Catholic Church. But for any such Marriage questions, couples should consult the pastor, who may refer you to a canon lawyer.

FAQ: Can my non-Catholic friend proclaim the Scripture we choose?

Office of Worship: A lector at a Mass should be a person in full communion with the Catholic Church, a person who is serious about the practice of their faith, and a person who is willing to complete the appropriate formation process. Proclaiming the Scriptures or reading the intercessions is not a role a non-Catholic can take in the Mass, unless the diocesan bishop specifically grants an extraordinary exception to a non-Catholic Christian. However, if the Marriage rites are taking place outside Mass, then there would not be any problem with a baptized non-Catholic doing the readings.

FAQ: I have children from a previous relationship, how or should they participate?

Office of Worship: Depending upon the age of the child, they could serve as a member of the bridal party (bridesmaid, groomsman, flower girl, ring bearer). Also, if the child is of the appropriate age, is a practicing Catholic and has received the appropriate training and/or commission, they could proclaim a Scripture reading or serve as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion (during a Mass).

FAQ: I need the whole morning to decorate the church. Father said we can’t decorate to that extent. Why?

Office of Worship: While reasonable decoration is allowed for festive liturgical events, there are several reasons why one should not completely revamp the entire church and sanctuary.

First, the proper décor for the particular liturgical season is a factor. Some seasons require that liturgies refrain from too much fanfare and display (see the next question about Advent and Lenten weddings).

Also, having the sanctuary redecorated could conflict with the decorations planned for other weddings or liturgies to be held in the church on the same day.

Furthermore, additional decorations should not distract from the primary focus, which is the divine liturgy itself. The sanctuary is the place where the altar stands, where the word of God is proclaimed and where priests and deacons exercise their office. The church, after all, is the house of God, and it has a dignity and purpose of its own — a purpose that lends context to the celebration of Holy Matrimony, not the other way around. The beautification of the church should serve this purpose, and pastors work to ensure this. The reception after the wedding would be the appropriate location for more whimsical and creative decoration.

FAQ: Is getting married during Lent or Advent discouraged by the Church?

Office of Worship: While Catholics are allowed to marry during Advent and Lent, they are not necessarily the best opportunities for overly festive liturgical celebrations. Particularly in Lent, the decoration and music during liturgies should correspond to the more austere nature of the season, which is characterized by penitence and restraint in preparation for the Sacred Triduum. For example, except for certain high feast days in Lent, the altar is not allowed to have floral decoration. Moderate floral decoration is prescribed for Advent as well.

FAQ: How does the new Mass translation affect weddings?

Office of Worship: When the new Roman Missal was implemented in November of 2011, the texts of our Mass prayers were updated to be truer to the Latin original. Thus, they are richer, more eloquent, and often contain more theological nuance and beauty. We can hear this in the prayers of the wedding Mass, including the Nuptial Blessing. In addition, the new Missal more explicitly acknowledges the intrinsic fes-

tive nature of a Marriage by prescribing that the penitential act be omitted and the Gloria always sung on those days in which the actual ritual Mass for Marriage can be used.

FAQ: I am close to a pastor from my youth. Could he celebrate the Marriage rite?

Office of Worship: Some parishes may allow outside priests to officiate. However, couples should speak to the parish pastor about such things. Also, for any liturgical event, a priest brought in from outside the diocese must officially register with the diocese prior to the event.

FAQ: Do Catholics hold Masses outdoors, in parks, state parks, etc.?

Office of Worship: The norm in canon law is that Marriages should take place in a church. The church is the house of God, and the proper place where the Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated with the Christian community. It is not the practice in this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

FAQ: Does the Church ever approve of the use of artificial birth control?

Office of Family Life: The Church teaches that every act of sexual love must remain open to the possibility of new life. This is because God has designed sex with both a love-giving and a life-giving purpose, and when couples choose to engage in sex, they must accept the act as God designed it. The only time that the Church approves of artificial birth control is when a woman has been raped, and the possibility exists of preventing the sperm from fertilizing an egg. In this situation, because the woman did not freely choose to engage in sex, she has the right to defend herself from a possible pregnancy. However, if fertilization has already occurred, nothing may be done to prevent the implantation of the newly conceived life in the woman’s womb, or to otherwise disrupt the pregnancy. In addition, sometimes a physician prescribes artificial hormones such as those in the “Pill,” not for the purpose of birth control but to treat or correct an underlying condition in the woman. When used for the purpose of restoring the proper functioning of the body, the Church approves of the use of these artificial hormones.

FAQ: Does the Church approve of any methods of family planning for married couples?

Office of Family Life: The Church approves

QUESTIONS

of methods of natural family planning (NFP), which teach couples to observe and interpret the naturally occurring signs of fertility in a woman's body. The presence or absence of these signs allow couples to identify the days when conception is most likely should they desire to achieve a pregnancy, or to refrain from sexual relations on those days when conception is possible should they desire to avoid a pregnancy. International studies have confirmed that when used to avoid pregnancy, NFP can have an effectiveness rates of 98-99 percent.

FAQ: Are engaged couples required to take natural family planning classes?

Office of Family Life: Those marrying in our diocese are required to attend a day-long Conference for Engaged Couples, which includes an overview of natural family planning. While it is not required, engaged couples are strongly encouraged to take a complete natural family planning class series, which are offered in either English or Spanish throughout the diocese. For a complete schedule of diocesan NFP classes, go to www.diocesefwsb.org/diocesan-offices/family-life-office/family-planning.

The Couple to Couple League (go to www.ccli.org/learn for a list of local teachers) and the Creighton Model (inquire at chartdaily365@frontier.com) also offer natural family planning classes in the Fort Wayne area, while the Natural Family Planning Program of St. Joseph County (inquire at nfpstjoseph@catholic.org) and the Creighton Model (inquire at youngesu@sjrnc.com) offer classes in the South Bend area.

FAQ: Are there other recommended resources on these issues?

Office of Family Life: The diocesan Office of Family Life has produced a DVD called "Beginning and End of Life Issues: Seeking Divine Wisdom" and a booklet called "Faith and Fertility: What the Church Teaches and Why," which present the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood, contraception and infertility. Both are available through the Cathedral Bookstore in Fort Wayne, (260) 422-4611.

The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, "Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan," is also a very good resource on these issues. It is available at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/index.cfm.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JACOBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Weekly dating ideas for married couples

Here are some ideas that go beyond the usual dinner and a movie. Many involve little or no cost.

Although having a weekly date may seem like a no-brainer, many couples' good intentions quickly get put off to some future time, when life is not so busy or there's more money. Pretty soon the kids are grown and couples find they've grown apart. Make a commitment to a weekly date. It doesn't have to always be on the same night, but it's helpful to pencil in one night each week on your calendars; you can always change the night if a conflict comes up.

Below are some ideas that go beyond the usual dinner and a movie. Many involve little or no cost. Not all dates have to involve going out, but if you have young children, getting a break from the kids is a stress release in itself. Getting a babysitter, however, can be a burden. Alternate who gets the sitter and develop a pool of sitters.

In addition to these suggestions, you might visit the marriage dating blog started by a group of 12 married women. The purpose of the blog is to help spouses—in this case, wives—to gain ideas and to have fun dating their husbands again. Check out



their inexpensive and creative ideas to rekindle the spark in marriage.

Absolutely free

If you're the responsible, conscientious type, do something together that's whacky but legal. If you're already the risk-taking type, do something responsible, for example, pick up litter around a park or volunteer at a soup kitchen together.

Try star gazing in your own backyard or out in the country. Just bring a blanket and gaze upwards together. If you're the scientific type, you might get a

star map and try to identify constellations.

Go to a public place (a train station, airport lobby, downtown gathering place) and people watch. Make up stories about the people who pass you, as if you're writing a novel. If you see someone who looks sad or distressed say a prayer or lend a hand.

Each spouse privately creates a funny costume from what you have around the house. (No need to buy anything, just use pots, paraphernalia, jewelry, and even root through your spouse's clothes to put items together in weird or scary ways.) Then come together and reveal.

Rake leaves together. Make a big pile and jump in them. Let go of any inhibitions about being neat and tidy. Don't have any fallen leaves? Find someone who does and volunteer to rake theirs.

Find an empty, open church. Sit, kneel, explore, pray. Let peace and reverence seep into your being. Quietly pray for each other. If you like, discuss your deepest spiritual beliefs afterwards.

Waiter's Night. Pick a night to "wait" on your spouse. You get the drinks, the snacks, his/her slippers, favorite game, etc. You can even dramatize your role as servant. Just make sure that you alternate the favor sometime soon.

Traditionally, parents fill their children's shoes with treats on St. Nick's eve. Try walking in your spouse's shoes for an evening — perhaps more of a challenge for the husband. Try to understand life from your spouse's perspective. Even if you don't exchange shoes, at least change roles for the evening.

Commit to a "tech free" night. Turn off your cell phones, computer, the TV and the lights. Use your imagination to see what's left to do without electricity.

Cheap dates

Go to an amusement park or arcade. It doesn't have to be one of those fancy, expensive parks. Go without the kids and BE kids again. Do those silly arcade games like skee ball or whack-a-mole. Impress your spouse with your strength or cunning ... or laugh at your ineptitude.

Play a game from your childhood — croquet, badminton, hide and seek, miniature golf. Reminisce and be playful together.

Pretend-You're-a-Tourist date. Look around your city and do the things a tourist might do — go to an overlook, a quaint neighborhood, the botanical gardens, a museum, whatever is special about your hometown. Gawk if you like, after all you're a tourist. (Inspired by Co-op America).

Build something together — ice cream sundaes, a pizza with your favorite toppings, a tower of blocks. Perhaps you will find a chuckle over the odd or weird combinations that reflect your different approaches to food, building and life.

Plan a "Favorites Night" around your favorite food, clothes, games, sports, etc. Each

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Bishop reports on success of ads aimed at strengthening marriage

BY PATRICIA ZAPOR

BALTIMORE (CNS) — A series of advertisements for the U.S. bishops' campaign to strengthen marriage have been successful in the numbers of people they have reached and the awards they have garnered from professional advertising organizations, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, said Nov. 14.

The bishop, who is chairman of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, made the comments on the opening day of the bishops' fall general assembly in Baltimore.

In a presentation on the work of the Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, Bishop Rhoades said the public service announcements with messages about marriage had been measured as having 1.3 billion "audience impressions" since they began several years ago.

He said the campaign "which won a national public relations award in 2009, has been the most successful of its kind ever sponsored by the USCCB."

A series of public service announcements with the theme of "a good marriage goes a long way," was released in September to 1,600 television stations and 7,000 radio stations, he said.

Bishop Rhoades reported that a series of ads for the "For Your Marriage" campaign that began in July 2007 had nearly a quarter of a million broadcasts.

A website developed for the



CNS PHOTO/NANCY PHELAN WIECHEC

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades addresses a question during a press conference at the annual fall meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington Nov. 14. Bishop Rhoades is the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

campaign — "For Your Marriage," www.foryourmarriage.org, and its Spanish-language counterpart, "Por Tu Matrimonio," www.portumatrimonio.org — also is being used in the campaign, he said.

"Since it was launched four years ago, it has attracted over 1.7 million visits with more than 6 million page views," said Bishop Rhoades. "I'm also proud to report that (the site) won a first place Thoth Award from the Washington chapter of the Public Relations Society of America."

He said the Spanish-language counterpart of the campaign has also done well, with a following of more than 1,900 Facebook fans, 300,000 visitors to the "Por Tu Matrimonio" website and a radio campaign being aired around the

country.

And a new website has just been launched — "Marriage, Unique for a Reason." The site is www.marriageuniqueforareason.org.

In a brief related report, Bishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of Oakland, Calif., chairman of the Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, said there are a great many challenges on the legal front to traditional marriage, ranging from various states legalizing same-sex marriage to the repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays in the military.

He said one thread of the subcommittee's efforts is to work on persuading the Obama administration to "press the reset button on the trajectory of undermining marriage."

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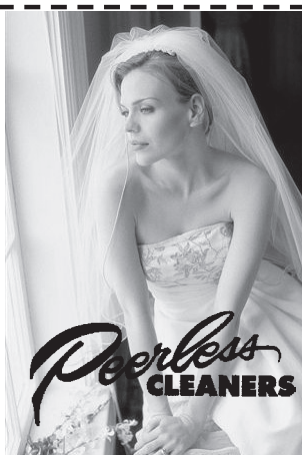
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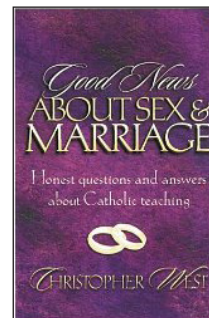
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Recommended books on marriage and family life

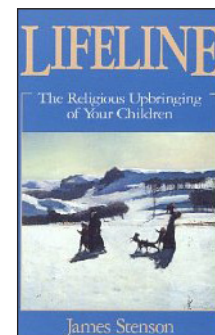
“Men and Women are from Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” Mary Healy, 2005, St. Anthony Messenger Press. This book is an excellent resource for becoming familiar with the main themes of the theology of the body. Each chapter ends with questions for reflection and discussion as well as a suggested practical application. Ideal for personal reflection or a small study group.



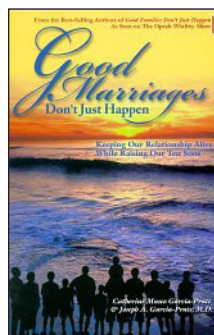
“Good News About Sex and Marriage,” (Revised Edition), Christopher West, 2004, Servant Books. This excellent book, written in an engaging questions and answer format, is especially helpful in understanding the Church’s teachings on human sexuality, and includes a discussion of many practical applications for engaged and married couples.



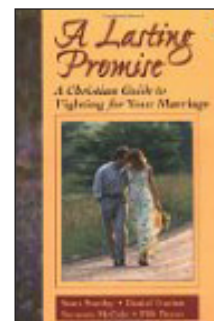
“Lifeline: The Religious Upbringing of Your Children,” James Stenson, 1997, Scepter Press. This book provides an excellent overview of the mission of Christian parents in the modern world. It offers strong emphasis on the virtues and the formation of character. Recommended for parents of grade school children.



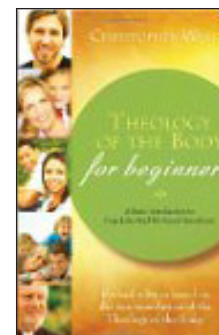
“Good Marriages Don’t Just Happen,” Catherine and Joseph Garcia-Prats, 2001, Thomas More Publishing. The authors of this excellent book are motivational speakers on parenting, marriage, and family issues. They have been married for 26 years and their 10 sons range in age from 24 to six.



“A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage,” Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain and Milt Bryant, 1998, Jossey-Bass. This book is an excellent resource for engaged and married couples on how to communicate better, avoid common communication problems and solve difficulties in a constructive way.



“Theology of the Body for Beginners: A Basic Introduction to Pope John Paul II’s Sexual Revolution” (Revised Edition) Christopher West, 2009, Ascension Press. This book provides a very good overview of the late Holy Father’s vision of human love and sexuality grounded solidly in Scripture, Catholic theology and the experience of married couples.



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Natural family planning: Understanding the body language of married love

BY LISA EVERETT

Blessed John Paul II devoted a significant part of his pontificate to articulating the profound difference between contraception and natural family planning.

"It is a difference, which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought," he reflected in "Familiaris consorti," "one, which involves in the final analysis, two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality."

In fact, the late pope developed his beautiful theology of the body largely as a way to understand more deeply and to explain more positively this essential difference.

What concept of the human person and human sexuality does the pope's theology of the body expound? It begins with the belief — echoed in Sacred Scripture, in reason, and in the deep recesses of the human heart — that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God, who lives in Himself a mystery of personal, loving communion as Father, Son and Spirit.

This is so important to reflect on at the outset, because unless we know who God is, we will never know who we are. If we are created in the image and likeness of a God who is not an individual but rather, a loving communion of persons, then we resemble God not only because of the rational mind and free will we have as individual men and women — we image God more perfectly and profoundly by living in loving communion with one another. This means that man and woman are not only both created in the image of God, with the same personal dignity and the same

supernatural destiny — man and woman are also called to become the image of God by living in loving communion with one another.

God has designed marriage to be the first, and in a sense, the most fundamental form of living out the personal, loving communion that makes us like God.

Pope John Paul II found in the familiar story of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, an ancient affirmation of this truth that man and woman are made for each other and meant to be a gift for each other. This call to communion is "written" in a special way into human sexuality, into the very maleness and femaleness of the human body, which are literally designed to fit together, to make a man and woman capable of becoming "one flesh."

As Pope John Paul II put it in "Familiaris consortio": "Sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love."

Sexual intercourse is intended by God to be the most intimate sign of the complete gift of self that a man and woman make to one another in marriage. It is the body language of married love.

This act, which expresses their mutual gift of self, at the same time makes them capable of the greatest possible gift — cooperating with God in giving life to a new human person, who is truly the two of them in one flesh, created not only in their image, with 23 chromosomes from each parent, but above all, in the image and likeness of God. This beautiful vision is the basis of all of the moral norms, which surround the gift of sexuality, including the norm that requires that every act



of sexual love in marriage remain open to the transmission of life.

How, precisely, are contraception and sterilization irreconcilable with this concept of the human person and human sexuality? In essence, contraception and sterilization contradict the meaning of sex as a sign and instrument of complete, mutual, self-giving love.

If I withhold my fertility from my spouse, which is an integral part of my identity as a man or woman, I am not giving myself completely in the very act which is supposed to express most profoundly my complete gift of self.

Here is how Pope John Paul II explained it:

"When couples, by means

of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings (love-giving and life-giving) that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as 'arbiters' of the divine plan and they 'manipulate' and degrade human sexuality — and with it themselves and their married partner — by altering its value of 'total' self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total, reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to

life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality."

The Catholic Church promotes natural family planning (NFP) because it completely corresponds with God's design for human sexuality, respecting the language of the body and the inseparable link between its love-giving and life-giving purposes. NFP is a scientifically based method of regulating conception based on observing and interpreting the "sign language," so to speak, that a woman's body naturally provides, which indicates whether she is fertile or infertile on a given day.

NFP allows a couple to prayerfully discern on a periodic basis whether or not God is calling them to conceive a child and then to identify the days on which conception is possible should they desire to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. Many couples find that the mutual respect, regular communication and shared responsibility that the practice of NFP requires strengthens their relationship with one other.

Most importantly, couples who use NFP have the assurance that they are acting as faithful stewards of God's gifts of sexuality and fertility.

For information on a natural family planning class near you, contact the diocesan Office of Family Life at (574) 272-7423 or visit www.diocesefwsb.org.



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Brooch bouquet: Something old, something new

BY KAY COZAD

Today's engaged couples are limited only by their own imaginations when it comes to creating a wedding celebration that will express to their guests who they really are. Every detail, from the reception decor to the wedding bouquet, makes their wedding day unique and memorable.

An inspired new trend is the vintage brooch bouquet. The brooch bouquet, a creative alternative to fresh flowers, can be savored for years to come as a display piece that will be sure to inspire sweet memories of that special day. Each bouquet is custom designed using eclectic costume jewelry within the bride's color palette.

Many brides have opted for the brooch bouquet as a way of including close family members, friends or deceased loved ones in their celebration. Some brides may request brooches from loved ones to be center-pieced in the

bouquet, either loaned or gifted. Others will receive a special brooch from each of the guests at her bridal shower, perhaps even an heirloom from a special grandmother, to be made into a bouquet. Still others will create bouquets using brooches from loved ones who will be unable to attend the wedding itself.

The bride and her bridal party or family members may even want to take a field trip to the local thrift stores to find jewelry to fill out the bouquet. It's a sure thing that those who participate will be delighted to see their brooch incorporated into the bride's bouquet as she walks down the aisle on her wedding day.

Brooch bouquets may be hand made, incorporating flowers, colored ribbons or feathers, or purchased on line. These bridal bouquets can be whimsical, brilliantly colorful or subtle and bejeweled, and will speak volumes about the unique and beautiful bride on her special day.



FILE PHOTO

DATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

spouse could choose a favorite activity, which you then combine into one evening, or the wife could propose her favorite activities for one date and the husband plans the next date with his favorites.

Ride a city bus for the whole route. Reflect on the sights you see and the lives of the people who are your fellow passengers. Debrief your insights afterwards.

Wait for snow and give yourself permission to make snow angels or make a snowman. Don't live in a snowy climate? Go roller blading or revisit your childhood by visiting a roller skating rink.

Visit a pet store together. This is usually good for stirring up warm fuzzy feelings. Restrain yourself from buying, however, unless you're really ready for a new family member. Talk about any pets you had as a child.

Ever gone midnight bowling? It's more than just bowling. Some places have special music, lighting and gimmicks. Even without these, it can be a ball of fun if you don't take it too seriously.

Look through old photo albums and tell each other stories of your childhood and families. If you feel really energetic, make it a time to put all those loose photos in albums or on a disc. It's a big job but your children will appreciate it one day.

During Lent, go to a fish fry. The fish is not the point. Seeing a community work together to feed the multitudes is a miracle in itself. Are you a member of a faith community? You don't have to like fish to check it out.

Hang out at a bookstore. Browse through your favorite sections. Many bookstores have cozy reading spots or a café connected with them. Assume an erudite persona for an evening.

Do something to nurture your spiritual life. Go to a church service, spend an hour in silence, pray the Way of the Cross in a

church or walk in a poor neighborhood to seek Christ's presence there.

Visit your local zoo. Spring is often an especially engaging time since you're likely to see some endearing zoo babies and glorious flowers.

Try a theme date like one around "quarters." Think of all the things you can do that use quarters like play a juke box, wash the car, take your picture together at a photo booth, play video games at an arcade. (Inspired by Co-op America)

Thrift Store Date. Pick a spending limit (like \$5 each) and see what crazy gift(s) you can put together for your sweetheart. Try creating a crazy or luxurious outfit for each other and wear it home. It may be the only time you wear it (other than Halloween) before you donate it back to the store. (Inspired by Co-op America)

Volunteer somewhere together — a nursing home, a soup kitchen, clean up litter from a park or along your street.

Pray a simple litany of thanks together, i.e. For our family, we thank you Lord. For a safe home, we thank you Lord. For our health, we thank you Lord ...

Outdoorsy dates

Water and moonlight can be romantic. Is there a lake, a river, a fountain near your home? Take a walk along a body of water at night. Pause and gaze at the light shimmering on the water. Dream and imagine together.

Do something silly that reminds you of your childhood. Climb a tree together, catch light-bugs or feed some ducks.

Try an old fashioned picnic in a secluded spot. Lay out a table cloth, some snacks or a meal. Some wine might be a nice touch. Perhaps read some romantic poetry to each other. It need not be original, just something you took the effort to find.

Take an early morning or evening bike ride together. Explore your neighborhood or the countryside. Stop at a quaint café for breakfast or get an ice cream

cone or other treat along the way. In fact stop whenever you feel the urge. It's not a race, just a time to discover together.

If tent camping is a new experience for you, try it, you might like it. Borrow a tent, sleeping bags and some advice from a veteran camper and spend a night in the woods — or at least a backyard. Snuggle, tell ghost stories and roast marshmallows.

During the fall, find a corn maze and wander through it. Night time is the most fun. Getting lost is part of the adventure. Ponder how your experience may mimic times in your life together when you felt lost, found each other, or found your way through a difficulty together. No corn mazes in your area? Search out a labyrinth. Many retreat centers have them.

At home dates

Curl up for an evening of reading. Find a book you both enjoy and take turns reading to each other, or each of you can read your own book in each other's company. For fun you might want to randomly read a sentence from each of your respective books and see what bizarre combinations this makes.

The Bible may not seem like a date book but try sharing your favorite passage with each other. Don't have a favorite passage? Explore the Song of Songs together. Share what you find physically attractive about your spouse.

During the dark of winter, make some light together. Build a fire in the fireplace. Don't have a fireplace? Light a whole bunch of candles in a grouping. Lay out a blanket and have an indoor picnic — or at least some popcorn.

Rent a classic romantic movie like "Casablanca," "Sense and Sensibility," "The Princess Bride," "When Harry Met Sally," "Notting Hill," etc.

Reprinted from www.foryourmarriage.org, an initiative of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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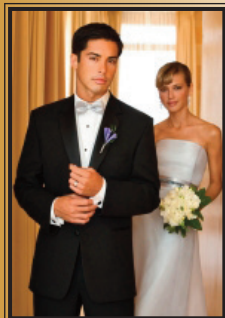
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