

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

SPECIAL 2016 SUPPLEMENT ON MARRIAGE

“I often think of the wedding-feast of Cana.

The first wine is very fine: this is falling in love. But it does not last until the end: a second wine has to come later, it has to ferment and grow, to mature. The definitive love that can truly become this ‘second wine’ is more wonderful still, it is better than the first wine. And this is what we must seek. Here it is important that the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ are not alone, but that the parish community is also involved, the Church, the circle of friends. All this — the right degree of personal maturity, communion of life with others, with families who support one another — is very important, and only in this way, through this involvement of the community, friends, the Church, the faith, God Himself, can a wine emerge that will last for ever.”

— Pope Benedict XVI, 2012

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Don't confuse marriage with other kinds of unions, pope says

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis said there can be no confusion between God's plan for Marriage as an indissoluble bond between one man and woman who are open to life, and other sorts of unions.

"The Church, in fact, can demonstrate God's unwavering merciful love toward families, especially those wounded by sin and life's trials, and at the same time proclaim the essential truth of Marriage according to God's plan," the pope said Jan. 22, in a meeting with members of the Roman Rota. The pope holds the annual meeting to inaugurate the Vatican court's judicial year.

Pope Francis said the court, which hears requests for marriage annulments, helps support families and the truth about the sacred bond of marriage.

In evaluating and judging marriage cases and contributing to formation, the Roman Rota helps promote and proclaim the truth, he said.

When the Church, through the court's service, seeks to declare the truth about Marriage in each specific case, it always bears in mind that those "who, through free choice or unfortunate circumstances in life, live in an objective state of error continue to be the object of the merciful love of Christ and therefore of the Church, too."

The two gatherings of the Synod of Bishops focused on the family were occasions of "in-depth, knowledgeable discernment" and they gave the Church a chance to tell "the world that there can be no confusion between the family desired by God and any other kind of union," the pope said.

"The family, based on indissoluble, unitive and procreative Marriage, is part of God's 'dream' and the Church's for the salvation of humanity," he said.

The Church will always offer the truth about Marriage, he said, "not as an ideal for the few,

despite modern examples based on what is fleeting and transitory, but as a reality that, with Christ's grace, can be lived by all the baptized faithful."

That means there is great pastoral urgency for adequate Marriage preparation, for example, he said, with a kind of marriage "catechumenate" that was suggested during the synods on the family. A catechumenate would entail a longer process of formation before Marriage, as well as during the years right after the wedding.

While the family is considered to be a "domestic Church," he said, the Church is the family of God. Therefore, the Church must be filled with a loving, "family spirit," where people are "no longer strangers and sojourners," but members of God's family, he said.

The Church — as both mother and teacher — knows that not every one of her children is perfect, he said.


"The Church knows that some Christians have a faith that's strong, formed from love, strengthened by good catechesis and nourished by prayer and a sacramental life," the pope said, "while others have a faith that's weak, neglected, unformed, poorly taught or forgotten."

The pope reiterated Church teaching that the level of a person's faith "is not an essential condition of matrimonial consent" and in fact, he said, it is not unusual for engaged couples to go into a Marriage with a limited understanding of the fullness of God's plan.

"The lack of formation in the faith and even error concerning the unity, indissolubility and the sacramental dignity of marriage invalidate matrimonial consent only when they determine" or condition a person's will, he said.

Precisely for this reason, "errors which concern the sacramentality of Marriage must be evaluated very carefully," he said.

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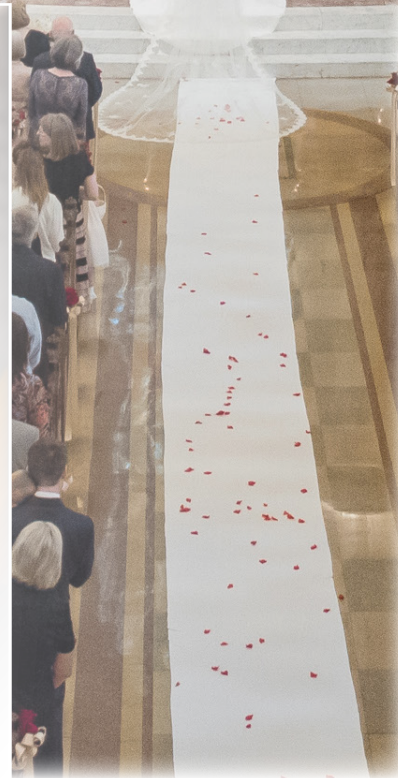
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Showing the face of mercy in married life

BY LISA EVERETT

With the Jubilee Year of Mercy well underway, it is good to ponder what it means to show each other the face of mercy in married life. Perhaps the first dimension that comes to mind is the willingness to forgive one another for the inevitable faults and failings that become all too apparent in living day in and day out with each other. A few years ago on Valentine's Day, Pope Francis spoke to a group of engaged couples gathered in St. Peter's Square about this very challenge:

"In general each of us is ready to accuse the other and to justify ourselves. This began with our father Adam, when God asks him: 'Adam, have you eaten of the fruit?' 'Me? No! It was her, she gave it to me!' Accusing the other to avoid saying 'I'm sorry,' 'forgive me.' It's an old story! It is an instinct that stands at the origin of so many disasters. Let us learn to acknowledge our mistakes and to ask for forgiveness. 'Forgive me if today I raised my voice'; 'I'm sorry if I passed without greeting you'; 'excuse me if I was late,' 'if this week I was very silent,' 'if I spoke too much without ever listening'; 'excuse me if I forgot'; 'I'm sorry I was angry and I took it out on you' ... We can say many 'I'm sorry's every day.'

The point that Pope Francis was making is that asking for and receiving forgiveness should be a daily occurrence in Marriage. Remember when the disciples asked Jesus how often they needed to forgive? Seven times? they proposed. Imagine their shock when the Lord upped the ante and countered, 70 times seven times! He must have had marriage in mind when He spoke these words, for no matter how much we love our spouse, there will be many times when we do something we shouldn't have done or said something we shouldn't have said. And what is even more difficult to acknowledge and admit sometimes are all the good things which we fail to do or to say, the so-called "sins of omission."

Mercy in marriage is mostly about the little things — the small hurts and slights, whether intended or inadvertent; the minor omissions that make our beloved's life less smooth or pleasant or full of joy than it could be. When we realize that we have said or done something offensive to our spouse, or omitted to do or to say what would have been the most loving thing, we should promptly offer a sincere apology. For example: "I am sorry that I wasted time on the Internet last night instead of helping fold the huge pile of laundry on the couch. I promise to pitch in next time." Going to Confession on a monthly basis is a wonderful way to

make forgiveness an everyday event in our Marriage. We not only experience God's mercy ourselves in this beautiful sacrament, but we are given the grace to extend that mercy to others, especially our spouse, 70 times seven times.

Another dimension of mercy, which is much needed in Marriage, was once described by St. Thomas Aquinas as "the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him." For St. Thomas this virtue of mercy has two aspects: it is an emotion that enables us to empathize with the sufferings of another person, leading to an action to relieve that person's suffering.

The Good Samaritan, for example, illustrates both of these aspects of mercy: his heart was wrenched at the sight of the poor man robbed, beaten and left for dead, and his compassion led him to spare neither effort nor expense to tend the man's wounds and take him to the inn.

In Marriage, too, we need to be Good Samaritans to one another — having a heart tender enough to be truly moved when we see our spouse suffering or struggling in any way, and having a heart big enough to help out in whatever way we can. It is not enough to have one of these dimensions without the other if we truly desire to live the virtue of mercy in our Marriage. If we were to feel compassion for our spouse without following through and helping him or her in some concrete way, we would fall short, and if we were quick to offer assistance without experiencing or expressing any empathy for our spouse's suffering or struggles, we would be missing the mark as well. In fact, this ability to feel with and for our spouse is so important that St. John Paul II emphasized it in a series of lectures he delivered at a Catholic university in Poland before he became pope:

"Tenderness is the ability to feel with and for the whole person, to feel even the most deeply hidden spiritual tremors, and always to have in mind the true good of that person. This is the sort of tenderness which a woman expects from a man, and she has a special right to it in marriage, in which she gives herself to a man, and goes through such extremely important periods in her life, such difficult experiences as pregnancy, childbirth and all that goes with them. Moreover, her emotional life is generally richer than a man's, and so her need for tenderness is greater. A man also has need of it, but to a different degree, and in a different form. Both in the man and the woman, tenderness creates a feeling of not being alone, a feeling

that her or his life is equally the content of another and very dear person's life. This conviction very greatly facilitates and reinforces their sense of unity" (Karol Wojtyla, "Love and Responsibility").

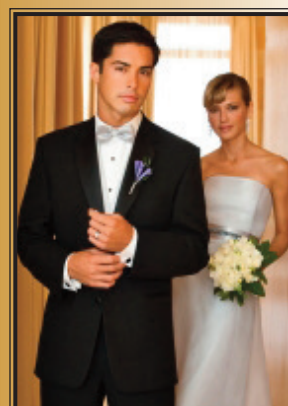
May this Jubilee Year give us the motivation and the grace we need to show to each other, more clearly and consistently, the beautiful face of mercy in married life.

Lisa Everett is co-director of the diocesan Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

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Put up a good fight: Rules for fighting fair

BY FATHER J. STEELE, CSC

When Jesus was 12 on a trip to Jerusalem, each of His parents thought He was with the other. Days of caravan travel passed before Mary and Joseph realized He was with neither of them. More days passed in frantic search before finding Him in the Temple. His only explanation was akin to "Didn't you know where I would be?" Ugh. Besides being a sign of Jesus' divinity, we can learn from the losing and finding of Jesus in the Temple that good people, great people, holy people and even saints can have differing points of view. Every married couple knows that no matter how much they love each other, they will see things differently. In Marriage, difference is built in. So, the goal must be not to avoid these differences, but to navigate them well.

Some years ago I was counseling several young couples around the same time and found myself giving the same advice over and over, so I condensed the advice to this refrigerator resource.

The list of Rules for Fighting Fair is divided between rules for the confronter, the confrontee and both. This is especially valuable for couples in which one spouse is reluctant to speak up for himself or herself. Let's take a look at each point.

For the confronter:

Face your fear of confrontation: For the reluctant spouse fear of confrontation can multiply a problem rather than make it go away. The fear of losing the peace or affection, or the unknown often unintentionally drive a wedge deeper by increasing the unresolved tensions. Think through what you have to say and present it calmly and lovingly so it can be received well by your spouse.

Confront to reconcile, not to win: A competitive spirit in a relationship can be a real poison. So, let's not let the ego get in the way. Eyes on the prize. And the prize is restoring affection and a communion between two loving spirits.

Discuss the conflict ASAP: Often when something is bugging us we start thinking about it over and over. This is like replaying an emotionally charged scene. Each time we replay it can multiply the emotion around it. Our emotions can quickly become disproportionate to the original cause. So, let's take care of it sooner rather than later.

Timing is everything: Growing up we all knew not to bother dad till he had been home for at least half an hour after work. He needed time to put his day away and settle into house and home. Know your spouse's rhythms and bring up your concern at the best moment.

State exactly what is bothering you: Beating around the bush sometimes clouds your central point. Find a way to say what needs to be said directly as well as charitably.

Confront with truth and affection: High emotions can lead to exaggeration and an overly negative tone. Strive to be calm and balanced in presenting your concern as well as affectionate. Prayer can be a great help in bringing the right spirit to the conversation.

When you ... I feel ... because: This formula for expressing a difficulty helps us to stay focused on the problem itself, not the character of the person. "You make me so mad," makes the person the problem.

Put up a good fight: Rules for fighting fair

Confronter

- Face your fear of confrontation.
- Confront to reconcile, not to win.
- Discuss the conflict ASAP.
- Timing is everything.
- State exactly what is bothering you.
- Confront with truth and affection.
- When you ... I feel ... because.

Confrontee

- Listen to learn.
- Assume good will.
- If your spouse says you do, then you do.
- Do not justify.
- Do not punish the other for confronting.
- Let the other finish.

Both

- Be respectful. No silent treatment.
- Remain calm/use time-outs as needed.
- Stay on one subject at a time.
- Keep the problem the problem.
- The past is not a weapon.
- Do not generalize: No always/never.
- No insults/character assassination.
- No mind reading/speak of actions, not motivations.
- Try to see things from your partner's point of view/empathy.
- No passive aggression manipulation.
- Forgive each other.
- Never discuss your spouse with a member of the opposite sex.
- Pray together daily.

Father J. Steele suggests posting the rules somewhere accessible daily like the refrigerator.

Confrontee:

Listen to learn: Nobody likes to be corrected, and our natural response is to defend ourselves. A defensive posture can be a real barrier to reconciliation. Rather, let's strive to learn from the other's point of view.

Assume good will: If your spouse has taken the time to bring something up, let's assume only the best motivations. Assuming darker motivations will only make things worse.

If your partner says you do, then you do: Our first reaction to a challenge isn't always our best, and it often is to deny the problem. Take your time to respond thoughtfully and confirm to your partner what is true about their point. This goes a long way toward reconciliation.

Do not justify: There is a world of difference between explanation and justification. Explanation helps the other understand your point of view. Justification is making something all right, which really isn't. The better tone is to explain why you do what you do and commit to improving in the future.

Do not punish the other for confronting: This can create problems in the future. If your spouse is reluctant to bring things up, they will tend to get worse.

Let the other finish: Interrupting will likely raise tensions, derail the topic and prolong the argument. Be patient. Try not to prepare a defense while the other is talking. Just listen and absorb it.

For both:

The advice for both is fairly common sense. Be respectful to each other. Avoid insults and broad generalizations. Do not attack the other's character, etc. There are a couple of important points, though, that could use some further explanation:

No silent treatment: The silent treatment can be cruel and a way to exert control over another. If you are not ready to talk, just say so and give some idea when you would like to talk, if it is in 10 minutes, or later tonight, for example. Otherwise, the silent treatment is unfairly punishing without opportunity for resolution.

Never discuss your spouse with a member of the opposite sex: If you open your problems to someone of the opposite sex, say at work, they are only likely to take your side. They may even make it worse by mirroring back to you an exaggerated version of your problem. They can leave you in a vulnerable moment feeling that someone understands you better than your spouse. Transgressions in Marriage are far more often fallen into than planned. Don't set yourself up.

Do not bring your Marriage problems to your family: Our first instinct in difficult times can be to go back home. An unintended consequence can be that you give a distorted and negative impression of your spouse to your family who understandably may hold onto that impression long after you have reconciled. Rather, each spouse should choose a friend of the same sex who is committed not to taking your side, but the side of the Marriage. Find someone with a good marriage who will be honest with you and help reinforce the bond of your Marriage.

Pray together daily: Lastly, nothing sweetens a Marriage more than the grace of the Holy Spirit. Rely on Him, confide in Him, seek His counsel and rest in Him. Nothing beats honest, heartfelt vocal prayer about everything that matters to you as a couple. He will not fail you. Let your Marriage be blessed by His constant care.

Holy Cross Father J. Steele is the pastor of St. Joseph Parish, LaGrange and Blessed Sacrament Parish, Albion.

Leaning on God: The power of praying together

BY LISA EVERETT

An arch is one of the most beautiful and functional architectural features ever invented, described once by Leonardo da Vinci as “two weaknesses, which, when leaning upon each other, become a strength.” But if you think about how an arch is actually constructed, each half leans, not directly upon the other, but upon the capstone, which literally holds the whole structure in place. This is a very good analogy for Christian marriage, in which an individual man and woman, each with their own weaknesses, lean on Christ, and He holds their whole relationship together. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: “Without His help, man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them in the beginning.” As a married couple, we can lean on Christ more consciously and consistently by learning to pray together as husband and wife.

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 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 married couples that you might find helpful.

1. 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?

2. One wonderful resource that can help couples to pray together on a regular basis is *Magnificat*, a monthly missalette-sized magazine. 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. You can order a subscription through their website at www.magnificat.com. Some religious bookstores in the diocese also sell current issues of *Magnificat*, and some pastors order bulk subscriptions and make them available to parishioners.

3. Another practice to consider is 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. In sharing aloud intentions with each other, we get a precious glimpse into what is truly on our spouse's mind and heart, and are able to together offer these concerns to the Lord. This can also become a real path to deepening communication and intimacy in our marriage.

4. Never make a serious decision in your marriage without praying together to discern God's will in the matter. One way to do this is to make a simple novena by writing down in your own words a short, sincere prayer asking the Lord to show you what He wants you to do in the situation, and then praying it together for nine days. By the end of the novena, be on the lookout for how He has answered your prayer. And never forget that parents are powerful intercessors for their children, and we should confide to Christ all of our dreams and difficulties in trying to raise them as His sons and daughters. The Book of

Lamentations contains beautiful advice in this regard: “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” (Lamentations 2:19).

When we develop the habit of praying together as husband and wife, wonderful things will happen. 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, which will do wonders for your relationship with each other.

Lisa Everett is co-director of the diocesan Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

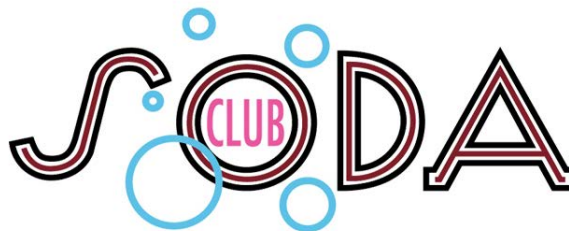


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FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

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.

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. The “unity candle” distracts from this reality. Also, lighting an extra candle that gets blown out at the end of Mass is really not the best symbol of covenantal permanence.

Can we have “our song” in the wedding?

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.

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 the liturgy must be a priest or deacon.

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

Office of Worship: In order for a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic, permission first must be obtained from the bishop, via the vicar general. Then, a decision on whether or not to have a Nuptial Mass needs to be made in consultation with the pastor or priest involved in the planning process. 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 it is also likely that 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.

If the situation involves a Catholic marrying a non-baptized person, a special dispensation is needed from the diocese, and it would not be possible to celebrate a Nuptial Mass.

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: In order to ensure validity in this situation, the diocese, through the bishop’s authority, must give permission to marry a non-Catholic and also a dispensation to marry in a non-Catholic ceremony. For any such Marriage questions, couples should consult the pastor.

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 undergo appropriate preparation for the role. 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.

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

Office of Worship: Depending upon the age of the children, they could serve as members of the bridal party (bridesmaid, groomsman, flower girl, ring bearer). Also, if a child is of the appropriate age, is a practicing Catholic, and has received the appropriate training, he or she could proclaim a Scripture reading during Mass. Another option is to act as a giftbearer.

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 litur-

gical 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 always work to ensure this. The reception after the wedding would be the appropriate location for more whimsical and creative decoration.

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 decorations 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.

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 festive 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.

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.

Do Catholics hold Mass in parks, state parks, etc.

Office of Worship: The norm in that Marriages should take place in a church. The church is the house of God, the place where the Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated with the Christian community. The practice in this diocese to grant exceptions.

Who should be paid a fee for the Mass? How is it determined?

Office of Worship: It is a long-standing tradition to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacrament (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has prescribed a fee, and there is no set amount. The priest or deacon may accept a gift given to him personally. Consult the parish office for more information.

For wedding liturgies, it is customary to provide some sort of stipend for the priest or deacon, such as the organist, cantor or choir members (sometimes for a choir, if one is hired for the event). These rates are set by the parish, so please inquire to the parish office for the practice is at your church.

Does the Church ever discourage the use of artificial birth control?

Office of Family Life: The Church teaches that every act of sexual love must be open to the possibility of new life. This means that sex has a life-giving purpose, and when a couple chooses to engage in sex, they must accept the possibility of God designed it. The only time the Church approves of artificial birth control is in the case of a woman who has been raped, and then only to prevent the sperm from fertilizing the egg. In this situation, because the woman has not freely chosen to engage in sex, she is not 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 womb, or to otherwise disrupt the pregnancy. In addition, sometimes a physician may prescribe artificial hormones such as those in the pill for the purpose of birth control but only if there is an underlying condition in the woman that is used for the purpose of restoring the health of the body, the Church does not disapprove of the use of these artificial hormones.

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

Office of Family Life: The Church approves 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 rate of 98-99 percent.

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 is offered in either English or Spanish throughout the diocese. For a complete schedule of diocesan NFP classes, go to www.diocesefwsb.org/Natural-Family-Planning. Also listed on this website is the contact information for other organizations that offer natural family planning classes in this diocese.

Are there other recommended resources on these issues?

Office of Family Life: The website of the U.S. Bishops' Natural Family Planning Program contains many resources that explain Church teaching on these issues, and it can be accessed at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/index.cfm. The For Your Marriage website also features many helpful articles and testimonies on topics related to responsible parenthood and natural family planning at www.foryourmarriage.org/?s=family+planning.

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Budgeting for your wedding

Costs vary by region, but the average wedding ranges between \$20,000 and \$25,000. Some couples justify their spending because it's a "once in a lifetime" event. Others feel pressured by families and friends to stage an elaborate celebration. Expectations may be greater for couples who have been on their own for a while. Presumably, they have more financial resources, plus they've accumulated lots of great ideas from their friends' weddings.

The Catholic Church understands a couple's desire for an appropriate celebration of their Marriage with family and friends. 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.

But what is "appropriate"? The U.S. Catholic bishops have not spoken directly about wedding spending, but couples might ask the following questions before setting up a wedding budget.

What do you want the wedding to say about you and your values?

Couples frequently say they want their wedding to express who they are. Of course, a

Christian wedding is much more than a personal identity statement. Still, this is a legitimate concern; after all, the wedding is the couple's first public act as husband and wife. It should say something about what's important to them. Do you want to express hospitality, gratitude for the support of family and friends, and a commitment to share your love with others? Then plan a wedding that highlights those values.

Are you willing to go into debt, or put family members in debt, because of this wedding?

According to a national study, debt brought into marriage is among the top three problematic issues for newly married couples. Many couples are already struggling with credit card debt and student loans. Do you really want to add wedding debt to the mix? Financial worries can strain even seasoned couples. Newly married couples are especially at risk.

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?

You may have heard the Engaged Encounter slogan: "A wedding is a day, a Marriage is a lifetime." In other words,

what are your priorities? The engagement period is not only a time to plan the wedding, but to prepare for your married lives. Too much concentration on the former can take time from the Must-Have Conversations that need to take place before the wedding. It can also turn you into an overstressed Bride or Groomzilla.

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?

The U.S. Bishops have called people to "carefully consider our choices and lifestyles." They

If you have a feeling that wedding expenses are getting out of hand, they probably are.

many of us can be easily caught up in a frenzy of wanting more and more" (Global Climate Change, 15).

Moderation is the key. If you have a feeling that wedding expenses are getting out

of hand, they probably are. To restore your focus, consider how your wedding might express your concern for the needy. Some couples prepare a large food basket that they bring forward along with the bread and wine for Mass. Other couples include a request on their wedding invitations that guests bring one or two

items of non-perishable food to the church. These are then given to the parish food pantry or a local food bank. Couples can also make a donation, from the money they may receive as gifts, to the parish's social outreach committee.

Can you really cut down on wedding expenses?

Absolutely! Check out the resources below to get started. Then take up the challenge of planning a dream wedding that won't break your budget.

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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.

Catholic wedding checklist

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 diocesan 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 priest and wedding party, in a rehearsal ceremony.

- Pray!

Marriage licensing rules and regulations

Preparation for marriage requires an intimate look at spiritual and relational desires as well as the logistics of the wedding itself. Engagement classes may assist with relational questions and a wedding planner is the perfect source for the details of that special day. And one small detail that must not be overlooked is legalizing the marriage with a license.

Here are some important facts about applying for a marriage license in Indiana.

- Apply for a marriage license in the county of residence at the county clerk's office or if from out-of-state, apply in the county in which the wedding will take place. The county clerk's office is usually located in the county probate or circuit court.

- A valid driver's license or picture identification card showing current address and date of birth is required.

- Some counties may require a certified copy of a birth certificate if applicant is under 30.

- The cost is \$18 for in-state residents and \$60 for out-of-state residents. **IMPORTANT:** There is a fee to use credit and debit cards as payment.

- Applicant must be 18

years or older to apply without parental consent. Under 18 must have a parent or legal guardian present and a birth certificate may be required. Under 16 requires a court order.

- License is valid statewide for 60 days with no waiting period to marry after issued.

- No blood test or physical exam is required.

- Widowed or divorced applicants must provide dates of death or divorce. Some counties require copies of death certificate or divorce decree.

Other little known marriage licensing facts in the state of Indiana include: cousins may marry if both applicants are over 65 years old, and proxy and common law marriages are forbidden.

A spokesperson from the Allen County Recorder's Office encourages couples to apply for the license together within a month of the wedding date to ensure the license does not expire before the wedding date. And finally, the officiating clergyman must sign the marriage license on the wedding day prior to sending it to the proper government agency for validation.

What is appropriate wedding attire for church?

BY LISA EVERETT

Every bride wants to look beautiful on her wedding day, and every bridesmaid hopes to wear a dress that is both fashionable and flattering. Beauty, after all, is one of the attributes of God, and women in a special way bear witness to the power of beauty to attract our attention. But part of the allure of beauty lies not only in what it reveals, but also in what it conceals, and this is where the meaning of modesty comes in.

Consider this beautiful description from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. ... Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love." — Nos. 2521-2522.

In a nutshell, then, modesty means dressing in a way that is attractive but does not draw attention to one's sex appeal or arouse sexual desire in another person.

When planning a wedding, it is important to take into consideration the fact that many bridal fashions today are much more revealing than in the past, and are not always appropriate attire for Church, which is a holy place — the house of God. In this regard, many Catholic churches take their cue from the dress code that is strictly enforced at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which specifies that clothing should cover the shoulders and knees for both men and women.

If we apply this standard to wedding attire, it means no plunging necklines or dresses that fall way above the knee. And while the majority of wedding gowns and bridesmaids' dresses marketed today are

strapless, it is possible to find some that are not, and some local retail bridal shops are able to add sleeves or wider straps to any of their offerings.

An alternative is to accessorize with an attractive wedding bolero, shrug, shawl or jacket, which are all over websites like Etsy.

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Marriage readiness

Having a successful marriage means more than FINDING the right person. It means BEING the right person. Sometimes, the FINDING part is easier. You can go to places where singles congregate. You can join clubs, pursue hobbies, or become active in religious or civic organizations. With any luck, you'll meet the one you consider Mr. or Ms. Right.

BEING the right person can be tougher. Are you easy to live with, generous, flexible, and willing to put your beloved's needs before your own? Above all, are both of you mature?

Maturity means knowing who you are:

- Your talents
- Your weaknesses
- Your interests
- The things you hate to do
- The values that you will not compromise
- The preferences that you are willing to bend on
- What you want out of life and marriage

Out of this self-knowledge comes the possibility of giving oneself freely to your beloved.

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