

CATHOLIC WEDDING GUIDE

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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Preparing for marriage taught us what is most beautiful about the sacrament of matrimony

BY EMILY MAE SCHMID

The day after my fiancé and I got engaged, I set out to plan our wedding and began a long list of phone calls. One of the most important calls I made that day was to St. Monica Church in Mishawaka to set a wedding date.

About one month later, I was overwhelmed by wedding planning and how it felt like it had taken over all my free time. How could I find time for relaxing when there was “research” on Pinterest to be done?

After talking to my fiancé, Drew, we decided that we needed to redirect our wedding planning into marriage prep so that we wouldn’t arrive at a perfectly planned wedding day unprepared for the actual marriage. So we called Father Jacob Meyer, the priest who will marry us this summer, and set up a time to meet — but we weren’t really sure to expect.

Drew had heard several stories from his parents about how their marriage prep consisted of only one brief meeting with their priest. That when the priest found out that they were both Catholic, he didn’t think he had much else to prepare them for, and sent them on their way.

“I am so glad that it’s not like that today,” Drew told me.

In our initial meeting, Father Meyer went over the basics of marriage in the church, which was a helpful refresher on the sacrament. We have been Catholic our whole lives but hadn’t explored the specifics of the sacrament of matrimony since high school sacraments class.

Because St. Monica is piloting a new marriage preparation program, next was a three-week series of group classes with other pre-marriage couples organized by Father Meyer.

The first class went over the theology that shapes what the church understands marriage to be. It covered everything from Adam and Eve to what the marriage relationship will look like in heaven. That was such a joy to learn about because it put our marriage in a whole new light! We came to a more full realization of the plan God has for us as husband and wife. Father Meyer sent us home with discussion questions that helped us go over really important topics like keeping God at the center of our relationship, being open to children and leading a strong spiritual life together for our children to see.

The second class was a presentation on the basics of Natural Family Planning, specifically the Creighton Model. Even though Drew and I were both generally familiar with fertility-awareness-based methods of family planning, we learned so much. I think we both walked out of that class in awe of what the female body is capable of and with a new appreciation for my cycle. We were so intrigued by this empowering, natural way to plan our family that we signed up for a more intensive class at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center. The more we learn the more amazed we are, and it has truly brought us closer in our relationship.

The third session went over something that I think our parents’ marriage prep was lacking: The practical side of preparing for a successful marriage. Father Meyer went over content from top marriage experts Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Gary Chapman. In this session, we learned about two of the most

important things that we are using to prepare for a happy, lasting marriage.

The first, from the Gottman Institute, was how to recognize and overcome “family of origin” differences. Most disagreements in our relationship actually come from differences in how Drew and I were raised. Some of these differences are small, such as the proper way to load a dishwasher; and some are larger, such as our financial philosophies, and all of them can become points of tension in our relationship for the rest of our lives. Father Meyer explained that recognizing these differences as coming from our families of origin helps to solve these issues. He was so right. Our discussions about things like this have been completely transformed: We listen better and solve things together and feel incredibly more confident in our ability to solve problems that will inevitably come up during married life.

The second was understanding each other’s love languages and was based on Chapman’s book, “The 5 Love Languages.” We learned that like most couples, Drew and I receive and give love in different ways. Without knowing this about the other, our chances of a happy marriage would be slim. Speaking different love languages makes marriage as hard as being married to someone who speaks Russian when you only know French! It leads to feeling neglected, even when your spouse is trying their hardest to make you happy.

Father Meyer encouraged us to discover our love languages and start practicing ways to speak the other’s language. Mine is quality time and Drew’s is physical touch. I can hardly begin to express how transformational this whole process has been for our relationship. Father Meyer explained that the church doesn’t just want us to stay married — it wants us to be happily married. Learning the five love languages was an essential part of preparing

for a successful marriage.

“From marriage prep, there are so many valuable things that I have learned that will help me — particularly during the most difficult times in marriage. Every marriage has its rough patches, but being prepared in advance to deal with those will be a major benefit to our marriage,” Drew shared with me.

The next major step in our Catholic marriage preparation was taking the FOCCUS Pre-Marriage Inventory. Individually, Drew and I filled out a 200-question inventory evaluating our core values and how we felt about our marriage. Then, separately, we went over the inventory with Father Meyer. This was hugely helpful because in the few places where we did have differing answers, we were able to resolve them calmly with practical and spiritual guidance from Father Meyer. He didn’t just draw our attention to certain things; he encouraged us to work through them in a healthy and supportive way.

Now, with four and a half months to go, Drew and I grow more excited daily for our wedding; not only because we are blessed to be celebrating the sacrament in a beautiful church with our friends and family, but because we are ready to begin a life together in God. Preparing with Father Meyer and learning about what is beautiful, good and true about marriage in the Catholic Church has been the most exciting part of planning a wedding — more wonderful than finding a dress, cake tasting or any other part of wedding planning. My heart is filled with joy thinking about what a gift from God my fiancé is — and what a blessing the process of preparing for marriage has been for our relationship.

Emily Mae Schmid is social media manager for the Secretariat for Communications for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

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One family, three brides, six weeks

BY CLAIRE KENNEY

For the Fogarty family, this upcoming summer will play out a bit like “Fiddler on the Roof.” Similar to the musical’s plot, three of the Fort Wayne family’s daughters will marry within weeks of each other.

Juliette, Kelly and Rachel plan to wed their fiancées in the months of May, June and July. “Brent and Rachel are getting married (on) May 20, Chris and I (on) June 10 and Michael and Juliette (on) July 1,” Kelly said. “Rachel and my weddings will be at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne and Juliette’s wedding will be at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at Notre Dame.”

For the women’s parents, Kathleen and Daniel Fogarty, the buildup to this summer is an exciting time.

“When I tell people that we’ll have three weddings in a six-week period, they seem to find it daunting. We find it wonderful!” Daniel said.

Kathleen and Daniel raised Juliette, Kelly and Rachel, along with their five other children, in a faith-filled, Catholic-centered home.

“Our faith has always been the center of our family life, with Sunday Mass and the sacraments, saying the rosary in the car, night prayers, reciting the ‘safety prayer’ that Kathleen wrote, grace before meals and through Catholic home-schooling,” Daniel said. Their view of marriage aligns directly with their viewpoint of the importance of faith at the epicenter of one’s life — in all that they do, including cultivating relationships.

“We have always believed that marriage is a union of persons with God in creating a family who serves the Lord,” Kathleen said.

Juliette, Kelly and Rachel recognize the significance of the example that their parents provided to the family through their marriage and commitment to each other and to God.

“My parents have always been faithful to each other and all of their children, but most especially to God,” Kelly commented.

“Our parents are generous, joyful and sacrificial,” Rachel added. “They have shown us how to put ... (their) family’s needs and well-being before their own, and have led our family in faith through their examples of prayer, frequenting the sacraments, and going to Adoration and daily Mass whenever possible.”

“The biggest example of my parent’s marriage for me was their faith life,” Juliette said. Her relationship with fiancé Michael draws on one very specific example from her mother’s faith life: As modeled by Kathleen, Juliette and Michael have come to both have a devotion to St. Joseph, patron saint of fathers. They pray to St. Joseph together at the end of each day.

“Our family has always had a strong devotion to him because of her (Kathleen)! This naturally just flowed into our relationship,” Juliette said.

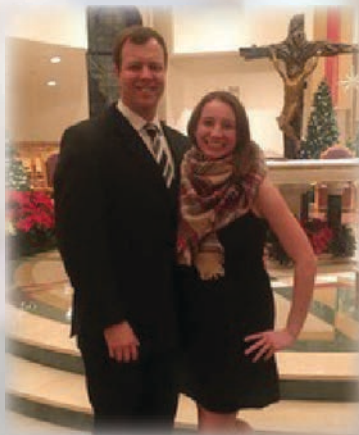
Though the wedding celebrations will happen during a similar season of the year, each daughter will incorporate a different theme into their wedding. Juliette will use gold and navy blue. Kelly plans to decorate with various soft pinks and creams as well as a light gold. Rachel intends to integrate mulberry, blush pink and cream.

One thing’s for sure, each woman and her fiancé understand the importance of including God in one’s marriage.

“It may sound funny at first, but if you think about it, if you put God first, He will want you to treat your spouse amazingly well,” Kelly said.

For these couples, marriage is truly treated like a sacrament.

“We are all very excited to be receiving this incredible sacrament this year...” Juliette said.



Juliette and Michael



Kelly and Chris



Rachel and Brent



Best practices for happily ever after

BY FATHER DANIEL SCHEIDT

There is a world of difference between a wedding homily and a funeral homily. At a wedding, the couple has the whole span of married “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health” yet to be lived. At a funeral, one can examine how, through time, the Lord has been at work in the person and in his or her marriage.

And yet at both a wedding and a funeral, Jesus Christ invites us to consider what the gift of a whole life looks like in His wise and loving plan. In my 16 or so years of working with couples preparing for marriage, I have come to realize that Christian marriage is rooted not simply in the couple’s life-long commitment to each other — crucial as this is — but rather in their commitment to the Lord. And this commitment is itself more deeply supported by the Lord’s commitment to them. Christian marriage is ultimately a celebration of Jesus Christ’s irrevocable belonging to a husband and wife, making of their two-in-one-flesh union a new creation.

My vocation to the priesthood began by way of teaching high school theology. My high school teaching career, however, passed by way of too many hours of my adolescence spent watching David Letterman. For better or worse, Letterman’s template of Top Ten Lists formed me. Thus, students at St. Joseph High School (from 1991-93) and Marian (from 2001-07) came to receive my Top Ten Dating Tips as my best advice to discover their vocations. Some of them still carry these Dating Tips in their wallets!

As former students met their future spouses and prepared for marriage, what I have come to call my Top Ten Marriage Tips emerged as a necessary sequel to the Dating Tips. In my homily to each couple on their wedding day, I share a variation of these tips as summary of best practices for living happily ever after. I make no claim to originality and actually consider these maxims to be the distillation of the wisdom I have seen embodied in the happiest marriages I have been blessed to know.

Obviously, these Top Ten Marriage Tips are pointers, not conclusions. Each couple must integrate them according to the unique particularities of their situation. Nonetheless, habits are essential to forming character and good habits are essential to forming happy, thriving marriages.

If I were to add a final tip as a bonus, it would be that a couple should always be reading a book together; just a few pages a day. It is the equivalent of inviting a wise, good person into their home to catalyze and enrich a daily, ongoing conversation about what the good life is and how to share it. The book could be placed on the kitchen table, in the bathroom, or on the nightstand — anywhere husband and wife would ordinarily have to spend a few minutes each day anyway.

Even as I continue to offer my Top Ten Marriage Tips to each of the couples I prepare for marriage, I leave the writing of books to the professionals. Some great books for wedding gifts are Gary Chapman’s “The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts,” Emerson Eggerich’s “Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires and the Respect He Desperately Needs,” and Deacon James Keating’s “Spousal Prayer: A Way to Marital Happiness.” Reading books is more satisfying than the entertainment of gadgets, especially given that Late Night With David Letterman is no more. Rest in peace, passing amusements — here’s to living happily ever after!

Father Daniel Scheidt is the pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Fort Wayne.

Top Ten Marriage Tips

- 1.** Your work must always serve your family, rather than your family being sacrificed for your work.
- 2.** Don’t just pay the bills but “pray the bills” each month, so that money worries are given to the Lord and do not become a source of division between you.
- 3.** Give to God the first portion of all that you make or receive. By tithing the first percentage of all the financial treasure that becomes yours (the biblical ideal is 10 percent) to the direct service of divine charity, your generous love will first extend the generous love of God.
- 4.** Use your planning calendar as an instrument of prayer, tithing one-seventh of your week for resting in the Lord on Sunday. Such Sabbath rest includes participation in the Mass every Sunday, this one hour constituting precisely 1/168 of your week to “God’s family time,” as Christ wishes.
- 5.** Remember your home to be a domestic church — the first place in which the Lord is worshiped and adored. Bless one another at the beginning and end of each day by tracing the sign of the cross on the other’s forehead. This continual sacrifice in your home, united with your sacrifice at the altar, forms of your lives an undivided eucharistic mystery in which Christ’s words become your own: “Take, this is my body given up for you.” Your children will inherit this blessing.
- 6.** Continually and tenaciously embrace the cross, realizing that love is not fundamentally a sentiment but a sacrifice. In other words, love is not a feeling but a commitment, specifically a commitment to seek what is good for the other person regardless of how one may or may not feel. The embrace of Christ crucified is the first and final true measure of what it means to love “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, for as long as we both shall live.”
- 7.** Fight fair, never making serious resolutions in a state of anger or desolation (St. Ignatius Loyola). Practice the art of admitting that neither one of you is able to resolve a given problem immediately; but rather, mutually agree to think about it, pray about it, seek counsel and then come together again to resolve it, so that the Evil One, who is called the Accuser, is cast out of your relationship (cf. Rev. 12). And receive the forgiveness of the Lord in the sacrament of confession as He intends, regularly — at least as often as you change the oil in your car: every few months or several thousand miles, whichever comes first! Forgiveness in marriage is not first self-generated by us but received as a gift from the Father of mercies, on His terms — that is, in Christ’s sacraments.
- 8.** As the cathedral builders of old hid precious objects in the foundations and on the heights of their work that only God was intended to see, leaven your married life each day by innumerable hidden acts of kindness that will not be discovered by your spouse right away, and perhaps only fully be revealed on Judgment Day. Neither one of you will then be burdened with trying to calculate here below who is doing more for the other.
- 9.** You must share your faith to keep your faith. Continually invite new people into your home and life. The more you give the faith away to others, the more you will receive back again — 30-, 60- and 100-fold!
- 10.** After obtaining a can of dark blue paint and some glow-in-the-dark plastic stars, and after consulting a star chart from a local observatory or the Indigo Night website of the major constellations in the night sky over the church on the day of your wedding, transform your bedroom ceiling into an icon of your home open to the heavens. You will be reminded every day of your married life that your love is older than the stars, because it comes from God; that your love is made to outlast the stars, because it is ultimately consummated in the eternal Wedding Feast of Heaven; and that your love abides in a holy communion of persons desiring your happiness greater than that which appeared at your wedding. Your family includes the whole host of angels and saints — the hidden supporters of your desire to live happily ever after.

Leaning on God: the power of praying together

BY LISA EVERETT

Did you know that studies show couples who pray together have stronger marriages than those who simply attend church together? Now, if you are like many engaged or married couples 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. But there is no doubt that learning to pray together is one of the most important things that you can do for your relationship, not only with God but with each other.

An analogy from the field of architecture offers a striking visual image of the importance of shared prayer in marriage. An arch is one of the most beautiful and functional architectural features ever invented, once described 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. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a husband and wife who invite Christ to stay and walk with them, day by day, will experience his presence in marvelous ways. We will discover that, as we draw closer to Christ, He will deepen our love for one another.

Suggestions for praying together:

1. Begin with a few moments of silence together to become aware of God's presence. 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 small monthly magazine. For each day of the month, it contains morning and evening prayer, the readings for Mass, a reflection from a saint or spiritual writer and much more. Try praying morning or evening prayer together as a couple, adding your own intentions at the appropriate spot. You can order a subscription at www.magnificat.com. Cathedral Books and Gifts in Fort Wayne and Divine Mercy Gifts in South Bend sell copies of current issues of *Magnificat*, and some pastors order bulk subscriptions and make them available to parishioners.

3. A simpler (and cheaper) option is to sign up to get the daily Mass readings in your email inbox every morning. Go to www.usccb.org/bible/index.cfm, click on "Today's Reading." At the bottom of the page you can subscribe by entering your email address. You and your spouse can read silently or aloud the Gospel of the day, and spend a few minutes thinking and praying about it, asking God to show you what it means for your life and sharing with each other any insights you receive.

4. 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 God. This can also become a real path to deepening communication and intimacy in a marriage.

5. Make a commitment as a couple that you will only decide serious matters in your marriage and family life after praying together to discern God's

will. One way to do this is to make a simple novena by writing down in your own words a short, sincere prayer asking God 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.

6. 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" (2:19).

When we develop the habit of praying together as husband and wife, wonderful things will happen. Sometimes we will hear God speaking in our hearts in a subtle inspiration or sudden insight, and sometimes our spouse will say something that strikes us as a message from above. At other times, 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; 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 that will do wonders for your relationship with each other.

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



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FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

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 marriage rites 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 fiancée is not Catholic and wants to marry in her church. What can we do for the Catholic 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.

How long before our wedding date should I first contact my parish to make arrangements?

Office of Worship: At a minimum, parishes tend to require that a wedding be scheduled at least six months in advance, thereby allowing time to go over all necessary preparations with the couple. That said, it would be wise for the couple to contact the parish as soon as possible once they know they will be getting married, because ensuring the church is available on your preferred wedding date should come before booking (and making a deposit on) your reception site.

Is getting married during Lent or Advent discouraged?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

How does the new Rite of Marriage affect weddings?

Office of Worship: A new translation of the wedding rites, now entitled the "Order of Celebrating Matrimony," replaced the old Rite of Marriage at the end of 2016. The wording of prayers has changed in the same manner as when the new Roman Missal was implemented in 2011, and a few other ritual elements have been added or modified.

One of these changes (which was already included in the new Roman Missal) is that the Gloria should be sung at all wedding Masses, even on weekdays of Advent and Lent — effectively elevating the Nuptial Mass to the same level as a liturgical Feast.

Additionally, the new rite requires that at least one scripture reading which "explicitly speaks of marriage" must be chosen for use at weddings, whether inside or outside of Mass. Such readings are now designated by an asterisk from among the usual full range of options for wedding readings. Moreover, throughout the Easter Season, the eschatological account of the wedding banquet of the Lamb from the Book of Revelation (Rev 19:1,5-9a) should now be used as the first reading instead of an Old Testament option — a fitting change that highlights the paschal context.

There are minor modifications in the wording of the questions and the consent. For instance, there's a new phrase inserted in the second form of the consent: "...in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do us part." (This actually aligns the American vows with what's traditionally been used in England). And a brief acclamation by minister and people (Priest or Deacon: "Let us bless the Lord" / All: "Thanks be to God") has been added after the consent.

There is also a new option for the assembly to sing "a hymn or canticle of praise" after the blessing and giving of rings. Heartfelt singing after the vows and rings have been exchanged can be an opportunity to pause and celebrate what we have witnessed, rather than proceed unceremoniously to the rest of the liturgy.

And two new cultural adaptations for African American communities, have officially been added to the English marriage rites. The first is the "exchange of coins" (coins), done after the exchange of the arras, then the spouses give thanks for God's blessing and a sign of the groom's blessing and Placing of the Lazo. The Lazo is a Nuptial Blessing. The lazo is a wreath that symbolically bind the couple together. The groom places it over the bride's head and the groom proclaims the indissoluble union of the couple.

There are a few other minor changes to the structure of the marriage rites.

I have children from a previous marriage. Should they participate?

Office of Worship: Depending upon the circumstances, children may serve as members of the bridal party (best man, ring bearer). Also, if a child is Catholic and has received the Sacrament of Confirmation, they may proclaim a Scripture reading during the Mass. A child may also be a gift bearer.

I need the whole morning Mass. My father said we can't do that.

Office of Worship: While reasonable requests for additional liturgical events, there are several options to completely revamp the entire church service.

First, the proper décor for the parish is important. Some seasons require that liturgical decorations be displayed. Also, having the sanctuary decorated for other wedding celebrations planned for other weeks of the church on the same day.

Furthermore, additional decorations can be added to the altar, where the altar stands, where the priests and deacons exercise their ministry in the house of God, and it has a dignity that lends context to the celebration. The beautification of the church is a way around. The beautification of the church and pastors always work to ensure that the wedding would be the appropriate location for decoration.

I am close to a pastor from another denomination. Could he celebrate the Mass?

Office of Worship: Parishes may allow a priest from another denomination to celebrate the Mass. However, couples should speak to the pastor of the church. Also, for any liturgical event, a priest from another diocese must officially register with the local bishop.

Do Catholics hold Masses in state parks, etc.?

Office of Worship: The norm is to celebrate the Mass in a church. The church is the place where the eucharistic liturgy is celebrated. It is not the practice in this country.

Who should be paid a stipend? Is it determined?

Office of Worship: It is a longstanding tradition for a priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding to receive a stipend.

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ions, popular in Hispanic and Filipino weddings, are incorporated as options within the Blessing and Giving of the Arras and the placing of rings. The priest or deacon blesses the rings and places them on the bride and groom to each other "as a pledge of good gifts we will share." The second is the placing of the arras, or veil, which can occur before the wedding garland or cord that is used to tie the bride and groom together, while a veil may also be placed over the bride's shoulders. Both these customs are common to the husband and wife. The content and practice may vary, but overall the content and practice remain very familiar.

Previous relationship, how or why?

When the age of the children, they could be a bridesmaid, groomsman, flower girl, or ring bearer, depending on the appropriate age, is a practical consideration. Appropriate training, he or she could be a priest or deacon at Mass. Another option is to act as a witness.

How to decorate the church. How much to decorate to that extent. Why?

Church decoration is allowed for festive occasions. Several reasons why one should not completely redecorate the sanctuary. The particular liturgical season is a factor. The church should refrain from too much fanfare and excessive redecoration could conflict with the readings or liturgies to be held in the sanctuary.

Decorations should not distract from the priority of the liturgy itself. The sanctuary is the place where the word of God is proclaimed and where the priest or deacon officiates. The church, after all, is the house of God and the purpose of its own — a purpose of worship and prayer, not the other way around. The church should serve this purpose, not be a distraction. The reception after the wedding should be a celebration for more whimsical and creative occasions.

Can I have a wedding at home or outdoors?

Canon law allows outside priests to officiate. The priest should be brought in from outside the diocese prior to the event.

Can I have a wedding outdoors, in parks, etc.?

Canon law is that marriages should take place in the house of God and the proper place is the church. The bishop of the diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

How much to spend and how is it paid?

It is a tradition to give a gift to the priest or deacon for another sacrament (such as a

baptism). However, the diocese has no prescribed fee, and there is no obligation to give any amount. The priest or deacon may keep any gift given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

For wedding liturgies, it is also commonplace to provide some sort of stipend for musicians such as the organist, cantor or conductor (and sometimes for a choir, if one is specially assembled for the event). These rates vary from parish to parish, so please inquire to learn what the practice is at your church.

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.

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, 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.

A Catholic wedding checklist

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

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

Building relationships of trust is at the heart of new diocesan marriage preparation program

BY FREDERICK EVERETT

When Mary-Rose Verret finally tracked down a married couple that she hoped would help her to coordinate a marriage preparation program at her Lafayette, La., parish, she was devastated by what she learned. The couple, who had only been married a couple of years earlier and had gone through her parish marriage preparation program, was separated and on the road to divorce.

What made it particularly troubling was the fact that this couple looked like they had everything going for them: They were on fire with their Catholic faith, they had made the decision to wait to have sex until they were married and they had done very well on their premarital inventory, which would have flagged problem areas for them. She was exasperated with the thought of what else they could

have done to help prepare them for a happy life together.

When she shared the news with the pastor at the start of a parish staff meeting, the pastor, too, was beside himself. He immediately closed the notebook in front of him and told his staff that they were going to pray in the church and ask the Lord for His wisdom. As he prepared to expose the Blessed Sacrament for a Holy Hour spent on their knees, he let Verret know that he would be looking for some inspiration from her at the end of the hour. She wasn't thrilled at the prospect.

At the end of that holy hour she had only a vague, preliminary idea of what would eventually become a model of marriage preparation that is now spreading to parishes and dioceses across the United States. The program that she and her husband, Ryan, would develop focused on building a relationship of trust between

an engaged couple, a mentor couple and the priest or deacon who would be witnessing the wedding. The key to this program, however, would be that the engaged couple would choose their own mentor couple instead of having one selected for them by the parish.

What Verret had found when she did further research and tracking was that the approximately 30 couples a year they prepared for marriage had about a 23 percent divorce rate. Even though they had stellar mentor couples screened and trained by the parish — along with

extensive couple counseling, a diocesan marriage conference and natural family planning instruction — the valuable information that they were imparting wasn't enough to see through roughly a quarter of the couples after only a few years of marriage. She found

that when problems began to emerge, the newly married couples were not seeking out the mentor couples that had prepared them for marriage. This dynamic needed to change.

The Witness to Love program model that the Verrets developed began with focusing on building up a relationship of trust between an engaged couple and a mentor couple. To do this required the engaged couple to find a couple who had been married in the church for at least five years, who went to church regularly and who had something about their relationship that the engaged couple

their pastor felt that it was worth a try. After a number of years, it has had phenomenal success. In fact, what they found is that both couples not only grew close, but they also grew closer to Christ and the church.

In this context, new information was not only shared, but it was appreciated and integrated in a way that it had not been before. As Mary-Rose put it: "You can have the best information, with great presenters, but if it isn't done within a relationship of trust, it doesn't stick." Choosing a mentor couple means you have "skin in the game." For the mentor couple, it means wanting to be a good role model and growing along with the engaged couple.

Having heard about Witness to Love over a year ago, my wife Lisa and I had an opportunity to attend a day-long workshop this past summer by Mary-Rose. We wanted to have an opportunity to ask her several questions and to better understand how the program developed and how it works. She addressed all of our reservations and her presentation convinced us that we needed to share this information with Bishop Rhoades. This past fall he gave the Office of Family Life the go-ahead to pilot the program in a few parishes in the diocese beginning this spring. The response by the pastors we have contacted has been very enthusiastic.

Finally, Mary-Rose has also been tracking the couples who have been going through the new program at her parish. So far, there has not been a single divorce. Sounds like a pretty good reason to move forward with this model in our diocese, too.

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

She found that when problems began to emerge, the newly married couples were not seeking out the mentor couples that had prepared them for marriage.

admired.

That was it. There was no requirement that the mentor couple be well-formed in the faith or even that they practiced or agreed with the church's teachings on marriage. While at the start this seemed to be a pretty risky move, they and



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Research from the Love Lab:

Pay attention to your spouse's 'bids'

BY LISA EVERETT

Dr. John Gottman has been researching relationships for over 40 years. It started in the 1960s, when he and other social scientists were trying to make sense of the skyrocketing divorce rate during that decade. His research on how relationships could be repaired after conflict led him to realize that what was most important was how couples maintained their friendship, intimacy and emotional connection in their everyday lives together.

To further his research, in 1986 Gottman and his colleagues built an apartment laboratory at the University of Washington that was dubbed the "Love Lab."

A few years later, he conducted a study with 130 newlywed couples, inviting them to spend the day at another laboratory disguised as a beautiful bed and breakfast retreat. The purpose of the experiment was to observe the couples' ordinary interactions in a relaxed setting, including nuances in facial expressions and other forms of nonverbal communication. In an article called "Masters of Love" posted at theatlantic.com, Emily Esfahani Smith describes what Gottman and his colleagues discovered.

"Throughout the day, partners would make requests for connection — what Gottman calls 'bids.' For example, say that the husband is a bird enthusiast and notices a goldfinch fly across the yard. He might say to his wife, 'Look at that beautiful bird outside!' He's not just commenting on the bird here: He's requesting a response from his wife — a sign of interest or support — hoping they'll connect, however momentarily, over the bird. The wife now has a choice. She can respond by either 'turning toward' or 'turning away' from her husband, as Gottman puts it. Though the bird-bid might seem minor and silly, it can actually reveal a lot about the health of the relationship. The husband thought the bird was important enough to bring it up in conversation, and the question is whether his wife recognizes and respects that. People who turned toward their partners in the study responded by engaging the bidder, showing interest and support in the bid. Those who didn't — those who turned away — would not respond or respond minimally and continue doing whatever

they were doing, like watching TV or reading the paper. Sometimes they would respond with overt hostility, saying something like, 'Stop interrupting me, I'm reading.'"

Gottman and his colleagues followed up with these couples six years later. Couples who were divorced by then had turned toward each other on average 33 percent of the time, meaning that only three out of 10 of their bids for emotional connection were met, and that pattern took its toll as the years went by. In contrast, the couples who were still married after six years had turned toward each other's bids 87 percent of the time. As newlyweds, nine out of 10 times they had met their spouse's need for emotional connection, and that habit made all the difference in their relationship.

Gottman's research points to a crucial dynamic in marriage in which we repeatedly seek to make connections with our spouse in the ordinary, everyday moments of our life together. As couples, we continuously make "bids" to each other, attempting to solicit some kind of affirmation, attention or affection from our spouse. Turning towards our spouse starts with becoming aware of the bid in the first place and paying attention to what he or she is seeking. A partner who turns toward may verbally acknowledge the other's statement, nod in agreement, make eye contact, touch the other's hand or respond positively in any number of ways. Every time that we turn towards our partner's bids, we are making a deposit in what Gottman calls our emotional bank account as a couple, little by little building up the posi-

tive feeling between us and the love that is experienced and expressed moment by moment in marriage. Gottman has found that couples in long-lasting, highly satisfying marriages have a ratio of five positive interactions (deposits) for every one negative interaction (withdrawals). In other words, they have far more deposits than withdrawals in their emotional bank account and plenty of reserves to draw upon when conflict occurs, as is does in every relationship. According to Gottman, when you turn towards your spouse's bid, he or she hears the following:

- I'm interested in you.
- I hear you.
- I understand you (or would like to).
- I'm on your side.
- I'd like to help you (whether I can or not).
- I'd like to be with you (whether I can or not).
- I accept you (even if I don't accept all your behavior)

Gottman explains that even though the reasons for failed connection are often due to not paying sufficient attention to the other person, rather than any kind of animosity towards him or her, the fact is that regularly missing our partner's bids adds up over time and eats away at the relationship. "It turns out that trust is built in very small moments," he points out, "because in every interaction there is a possibility of connection with a partner, or turning away." When a spouse does not respond in a positive way to our bids for emotional connection, what happens is that we begin to lose trust in them.

So whether we are preparing for marriage or have been married for many years, let's

make a commitment to become more aware of our partner's bids and to turn towards him or her as often as possible. As a recent Marriage Minute from the Gottman Institute put it: "Love is cultivated during the grind of everyday life. Couples often ignore each other's emotional needs out of

mindlessness, not malice. We are distracted by our books, phones, laptops and televisions. For many couples, just realizing that they shouldn't take their everyday interactions for granted makes an enormous difference in their relationship."



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Family planning with benefits

How fertility awareness-based methods can enrich marriage

BY LISA EVERETT

Fertility awareness-based methods of family planning, commonly called Natural Family Planning or NFP, are those that teach couples to observe and interpret on a daily basis the biomarkers of fertility that naturally occur in a woman's body. This awareness of their fertility enables couples to identify the days on which conception is most likely, should they desire to conceive a child, or in contrast, to refrain from sexual relations on the days when conception is possible, should they desire to avoid a pregnancy. International studies confirm that, when used correctly, NFP can have a success rate of 98-99 percent. But beyond being an effective method a family planning, fertility awareness-based methods can strengthen the love between spouses and benefit their marriage in three important areas. **NFP fosters communication and enhances emotional intimacy**

The successful practice of NFP requires couples to com-

municate regularly and effectively, not only about details involved in using the method but also regarding the larger and deeper questions about what God is calling them to in their marriage. In a sense, the question comes up every cycle: Are we going to use the fertile period this month to try to conceive, or do we have a serious reason to postpone a pregnancy in our present circumstances? In addition, the periodic abstinence from genital intimacy, which is entailed if a couple is avoiding pregnancy, provides them with a monthly "push" to express their love for each other in other ways, which can enhance their emotional intimacy and deepen their friendship. As important and powerful a "love language" as sex is in marriage, it is not the only one, and NFP provides couples with ongoing opportunities to practice speaking their spouse's primary love language. One husband confessed that the practice of NFP caused him to realize that his relationship with his wife needed work. "I discovered that I had placed

more emphasis on genital intimacy than relational intimacy... Periodic genital continence reminds me that I have to attempt to gratify the relational needs of our marriage. I have to make a deliberate, reflective effort to continue to maintain the quality of our relationship regardless of when we have sex. ... Continence does me a favor. It provides me with a 'rhythmic' opportunity to make sure it is love and intimacy, not sex, which binds me to my wife. The periodic tension that sometimes comes with continence means we frequently examine our relationship, our needs, our communication and the quality of our intimacy and affection."

NFP fosters reciprocal respect and shared responsibility

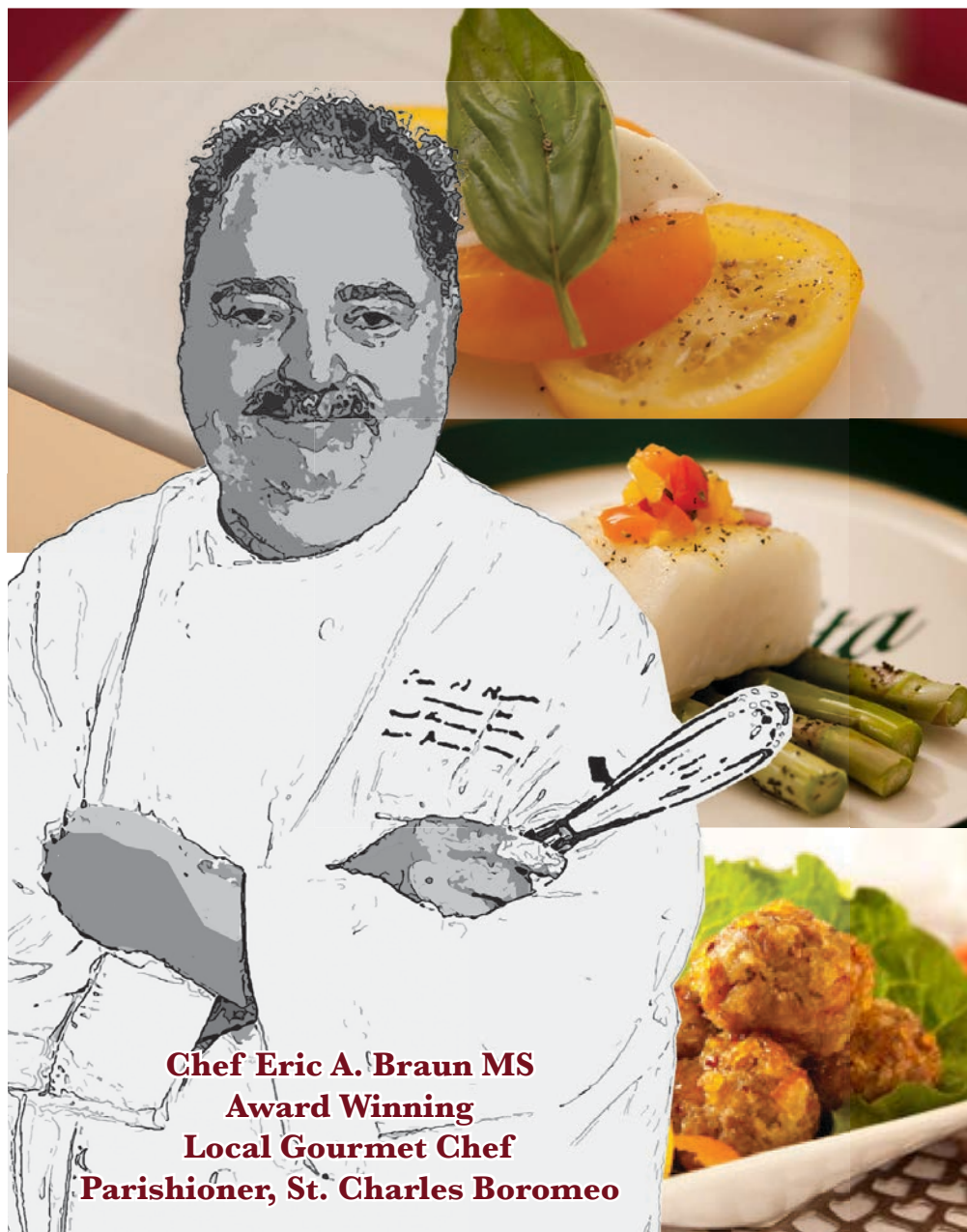
NFP is based on a profound respect for how God has designed us as men and women. Neither the husband nor the wife has to withhold, diminish or destroy their fertility, but rather, both spouses work in cooperation with the woman's cycle. Couples who use NFP work as real partners to interpret the biomarkers

of fertility in the woman's body during each cycle and to apply the rules of the method depending on their family planning intention. As one husband reflected: "Why shouldn't the fertility cycle be respected when it comes to sex? Why shouldn't husbands conform their desires and actions to the natural rhythms of their wives' bodies, rather than ignoring or suppressing them?"

Not surprisingly, the early pioneers of the women's movement understood intuitively that contraception degraded the dignity of women. Far from insisting on "reproductive freedom," 19th century feminists considered contraception to be "unnatural," "injurious," and "offensive" to women, and feared that its use in marriage would relegate women even further to being regarded as sex objects by their husbands. More than a century later, Pope Paul VI sounded the same alarm in "Humanae Vitae": "A man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and

emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection."

In contrast, the husband who practices NFP is willing to postpone his own sexual pleasure for the sake of his wife's well-being. Here is how one wife experienced the self-sacrificing love of her husband during a difficult cycle in which stress delayed ovulation, resulting in a longer-than-normal period of abstinence: "He began to understand that God was using this time of abstinence to teach him temperance, self-control and that charity involves acts of sacrifice, not just emotional affection. He could see from my cycle that I was under great stress and he realized that it was his duty to console me and help me through these difficulties. In other words, the chart spoke to him and told him more about his wife than he understood from her words. We survived that difficult cycle, which both of us remember as the turn-



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ing point in our relationship. Abstinence does make the heart grow fonder. We were sacrificing something important for each other, and we each knew it.”
NFP safeguards the total, mutual gift of self that sex is meant to signify

Sex is intended by God to be the most intimate sign of the mutual gift of self that a man and woman make to one another in marriage. It is designed to be a dialogue in which a husband and wife “say” to each other, through the language of the body, what they said aloud publicly on the altar on their wedding day: I accept you completely as the gift that God created you to be, and I give myself to you completely in return. But a spouse is not giving himself or herself completely to the other in this dialogue if at the same time he or she is withholding from their other the fertility that is an integral part of identity as a man or woman.

In contrast, the practice of NFP safeguards sex as a sign of

total, mutual self-giving. Here is how one husband describes his experience: “As I now reflect back over our 36 years of marriage, I can see that the practice of NFP has been a freeing experience for me. Our fertility as a couple has been an awesome gift. ... For me, NFP has helped me to get my intellect, will and emotions all lined up in one direction so that I can strive to give myself totally to Ann Marie in the act of [intercourse], and not just be responding to a sensual urge.”

Learning NFP has never been easier, and a marriage stands everything to gain. For more information on a nearby class series go to www.diocesefwsb.org/Natural-Family-Planning; or to find distance learning opportunities see www.usccb.org

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

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.

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

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