

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

WEDDING FAQ

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GEORGE KILLIAN

Guidelines offered for those preparing for marriage

Dear Engaged Couple,

Congratulations on your engagement! I want to welcome you to this time of marriage preparation in the Catholic Church.

While you already have had time to discover whether this is the right man or woman to marry, this is a special period meant for more than just arranging the wedding ceremony and the reception — it also should be a time of grace in preparation for your future lives together.

As you work with our priests and married couples, they will help you reflect on various issues dealing with both your past and your future. One important area which many priests and couples have shared their concerns with me is that of engaged couples living together before marriage. Not too long ago, such a situation was uncommon and seen unfavorably in society. Today, it is much more common and there is not as much of a social stigma attached to it. Even so, regardless of a couple's motivations, living together and having sexual relations before marriage cannot be reconciled with what God expects of us nor with what makes good sense for the relationship.

Contrary to popular belief couples who live together before marriage have higher rates of divorce and domestic violence, and have a poorer quality of communication than those who do not. Studies show only negative results from living together before marriage. I write this not to make couples who are living together feel they are being judged. Rather, I write it to encour-

age them to use this time of preparation to live a truly Christian lifestyle. This applies also to those couples who have not been living together, but already have been engaging in sexual relations. Remember, your engagement is meant to be a time of grace and growth in preparing for your marriage.

[More on the guidelines for preparing for marriage](#)
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In the months ahead, I urge all engaged couples who are living together to separate and those who are engaging in sexual relations to stop. Those who are Catholic should seek to be reconciled with God by going to confession. The generosity, self-restraint and good communication that are needed for marriage do not suddenly appear

on the wedding day; they must be cultivated far in advance. Living chastely during your remaining months of engagement will teach you many things about one another. Such chaste living can draw you closer together. It may even reveal to you that you are not quite ready for Christian marriage at this time. In the days ahead, it is my hope and prayer for you that you will seek the help of God, who alone can fulfill your deepest hopes for your life together.

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

Most Reverend John M. D'Arcy
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Natural family planning: Separating myth from fact

BY LISA EVERETT

We all know how difficult it is to separate myth from fact about many issues, and natural family planning (NFP) is no different. Here are the five most common myths about NFP and the scientific research which disproves them:

Myth No. 1: NFP is not as effective as contraception in avoiding pregnancy.

Fact: When used correctly, natural family planning is as effective as oral contraceptives in preventing pregnancy.

Researchers have confirmed that the sympto-thermal method (STM) of natural family planning is as effective as the contraceptive pill for avoiding unplanned pregnancies if used correctly, according to a 2007 report published online in Europe's leading reproductive medicine journal *Human Reproduction*.

The sympto-thermal method (STM) is a form of natural family planning (NFP) that enables couples to identify accurately the time of the woman's fertile phase by interpreting changes in cervical mucus and basal body temperature. In the largest prospective study of STM, the researchers found that if the couples abstained from sex during the fertile period, the rate of unplanned pregnancies per year was 0.4 percent.

The lead author of the report, Petra Frank-Herrmann, assistant professor and managing director of the natural fertility section in the Department of Gynecological Endocrinology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, said: "For a contraceptive method to be rated as highly efficient as the hormonal pill, there should be less than one pregnancy per 100 women per year when the method is used correctly. The pregnancy rate for women who used the STM method correctly in our study was 0.4 percent, which can be interpreted as one pregnancy occurring per 250 women per year. Therefore, we maintain that the effectiveness of STM is comparable to the effectiveness of modern contraceptive methods such as oral contraceptives, and is an effective and acceptable method of family planning."

— Source: European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (2007, Feb. 21). *Natural Family Planning Method As Effective As Contraceptive Pill, New Research Finds*. Available at www.sciencedaily.com

Myth No. 2: Couples who use NFP have sexual relations less fre-

quently than do couples who use contraception.

Fact: Couples who use NFP have sex as often as couples who use contraception — they just time it differently.

A 2005 study conducted by the Georgetown University Institute for Reproductive Health found that "couples using natural family planning have intercourse just as frequently as couples using other methods," noted Institute for Reproductive Health Director Victoria Jennings, Ph.D. Jennings is an anthropologist who studies health behavior and culture change and is a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Georgetown University Medical Center.

Use of fertility-based awareness methods strongly influences the timing of sexual activity, reported study authors Irit Sinai, Ph.D. and Marcos Arevalo, M.D., both assistant professors of obstetrics and gynecology. They found that couples who use fertility awareness-based methods of family planning to prevent pregnancy engage in more frequent sexual relations before and after the fertile time. Frequency of intercourse over the course of the women's cycle is comparable to that of couples using other methods of family planning.

"It's important that the health-care community let women know that these methods are available, growing in popularity, and that users continue to be satisfied with them. If couples using fertility-awareness based family planning methods were having less sex, this would probably not be the case," said Dr. Arevalo, the institute's director of biomedical research.

— Source: Georgetown University Medical Center (2005, Oct. 12). *It's All In The Timing*. *ScienceDaily*. Available at www.sciencedaily.com

Myth No. 3: NFP can only be used by women with regular cycles.

Fact: NFP can be used by women with irregular cycles, and can even help detect, diagnose and treat gynecological problems, including infertility.

It is important to realize that the "rhythm" or calendar method relied on previous menstrual cycles to predict ovulation, which in practice often proved inaccurate, even for women with regular menstrual cycles, let alone for women whose cycles are not regular. In contrast, modern methods of NFP are based on a day-by-day observation and interpretation of the biomarkers of fertility and infertility in a woman's body, regardless of whether her cycle is regular.

This knowledge enables a cou-

For more information or to locate

an NFP class near you, please contact the diocesan

Office of Family Life at (574) 234-0687 or e-mail

haustgen@fw.diocesefwsb.org.



CNS photo/Peter Casamento

Drs. Evelyn and John Billings are pictured in the garden of their home in Melbourne, Australia, in this 2004 file photo. John Billings, who with his wife pioneered a revolutionary church-backed method for couples to avoid or achieve conception, died April 1, 2007 in Richmond, Australia. By the time of his death, teaching centers on the Billings Ovulation Method of natural family planning had been established in more than 100 countries.

ple to identify on a daily basis whether or not conception is possible on that particular day. Besides equipping a couple either to achieve or to avoid a pregnancy, this knowledge enables a woman to monitor her gynecological health and identify any abnormalities.

The Creighton Model FertilityCare System (CrMS) is a natural family planning system that is particularly designed to detect and diagnose abnormalities in the menstrual cycle. By applying the new women's health science of NaProTECHNOLOGY, the CrMS is able to effectively treat and in many cases, correct, conditions such as irregular or abnormal bleeding, ovarian cysts, polycystic ovary syndrome, PMS, infertility, repeat miscarriages, premature delivery and postpartum depression. NaProTECHNOLOGY is nearly three times more successful than IVF in assisting infertile couples to conceive, and is completely in accord with Catholic moral principles.

Myth No. 4: NFP is complicated and difficult to use.

Fact: Illiterate couples in the Third World use NFP successfully. In 1976, the World Health Organization conducted a prospective study of the ovulation method

of NFP in five different countries. The purpose of the study was to determine the proportion of women who are capable of recognizing the changes in cervical mucus during the menstrual cycle as well as the use-effectiveness of the method in fertility control.

In Bangalore, India, couples were drawn from both urban and rural areas and were mostly illiterate or semiliterate. None of the women had used the ovulation method before. In the cycle following instruction, understanding of the method was evaluated as "excellent or good" in 96.6 percent of the cases; in the second and third cycles, the figure rose to 97 percent with regard to interpretable mucus pattern. The method-failure rate was 0 in Bangalore while the user-effectiveness of the method in Bangalore was 96 percent in over 7,514 cycles of observation. The World Health Organization recommended that the ovulation method be used in India.

— Source citation: Bangalore, India, WHO, (1980). 5 p.

Myth No. 5: When used to avoid pregnancy, NFP is really no different morally than contraception.

Fact: NFP and contraception involve two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and human sexuality.

Pope John Paul II developed his beautiful "theology of the body" largely as a way to explain the profound difference between contraception and natural family planning. "(It) is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought," he reflected, "one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality" ("Familiaris Consortio," 32).

According to the church's view, sexual union is intended by God to be the most intimate sign of the complete gift of self that a man and woman make to one another in marriage. This act, which expresses their complete gift of self to one another at the same time, makes them capable of the greatest possible gift — cooperating with God in giving life to a new human person, who is literally the two of them "in one flesh."

Inscribed in this sacred act, therefore, is an inseparable connection between its love-giving purpose and its life-giving potential, between communion with one another as spouses and communion with God as the Lord and giver of life.

The church teaches about these two dimensions of sex what Christ himself taught about the bond between husband and wife: we must not separate what God has joined. This means that married couples must respect the integrity of the act of intercourse whenever they choose to engage in it: "Each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life" ("Humanae Vitae," No. 11).

Natural family planning respects the sacredness of sex as God designed it since the method does nothing to suppress the life-giving potential of sexual union. Couples simply refrain from sexual relations during the fertile time if they are not prepared to accept the life-giving potential of that act.

In contrast, contraception separates what God has joined. It not only implies a positive refusal to be open to the possibility of new life coming from a particular act of intercourse, but it also contradicts the meaning of sex as a sign of total self-giving. I am not giving myself totally to my spouse in sexual union if, at the same time, I am withholding from him or her my fertility, a gift which has the potential to unite us in the most profound way possible.

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

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This Q&A is an attempt to provide basic answers to some of the more common questions about marriages. For any special question pertaining to validity or proper celebration of the wedding, couples should always check with their pastors, or speak directly to the competent authority within the diocese.

FAQ: What is the symbolism of the rings?

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

FAQ: Whatever happened to the unity candle?

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

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

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

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

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

FAQ: My fiancé is not Catholic, should we have a Mass?

Office of Worship: A nuptial Mass is obviously the ideal. 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 Eucharist since he or she would not be Catholic, and, most likely, most of the non-Catholic’s family would not be Catholic. Therefore, it might sometimes provide a greater sign of unity for the couple to have the rite of marriage outside of Mass.

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

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

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

Office of Worship: A proclaimer of the word needs to be a person in full communion with the Catholic Church, a person who is serious about the practice of their faith and a person who is willing to complete the appropriate formation process. Being proclaimer of the word is not a role a non-Catholic can take in the Mass. However, a non-Catholic can serve as a gift bearer or read the petitions during the prayer of the faithful.

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

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

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

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

First, the proper décor for the particular liturgical season is a factor. Some seasons require that liturgies refrain from too much fanfare and display (see the 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 the priest and deacon exercise their office. The church, after all, is the house of God, and it has a dignity and purpose of its own — a purpose that lends context to the celebration of holy matrimony, not the other way around. The beautification of the church should serve this purpose, and pastors work to ensure this. The reception after the wedding would also be the appropriate location for more whimsical and creative decoration.

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

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

FAQ: What are the guidelines regarding parish membership and our wedding and priests saying the Mass?

Office of Worship: These rules really depend on the parish.

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

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

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

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

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

Office of Family Life: The church teaches that every act of sexual love must remain open to the possibility of new life. This is because God has designed sex with both a love-giving and a life-giving purpose, and when couples choose to engage in sex, they must accept the act as God designed it. The only time that the church approves of artificial birth control is when a woman has been raped, and the possibility exists of preventing the sperm from fertilizing an egg. In this situation, because the woman did not freely choose to engage in sex, she has the right to defend herself from a possible pregnancy. 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.

Guidelines for marriage preparation, couples living together

Question: Is it true the diocese has issued a policy for couples preparing for marriage?

Answer: Yes, in preparing couples for marriage in the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend pledges to assist you in entering this vocation with faith, emotional maturity and full intentions regarding fidelity, openness to children and permanence. We expect couples to be attending Mass regularly (if Catholic), to be living apart and reserving sexual relations until after the wedding, and to be modeling the virtues of charity and justice in their lives.

If a pastor evaluates that a couple is unable or unwilling to accept or work toward these expectations, then he may delay marriage in the church while continuing to minister to the couple in the hope of fostering their spiritual and emotional growth. Or he may ask that the wedding ceremony be small — for example, the couple, two witnesses and the immediate families.

Question: My fiancé and I think we have good reasons for living together before the wedding. Why can't the church just accept it? And what's so wrong with premarital sex anyway, after all, we're engaged and committed to each other?

Answer: We offer these responses to three common reasons given for living together and engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage: "It's convenient. We've already started moving our stuff. We're attracted to each other."

Convenience is not the best way to make a free and conscious choice for a lifetime. Honest communication, careful thought and enough "space" lead to making wise choices. A scholar noted that of 100 couples who had lived together, married and then were divorced within five years, the

majority had discussed vital issues only in the most general terms, avoiding deeper discussions in vital areas because they were afraid their differences might spoil the relationship. — "When Unmarried Couples Live Together," by Dr. Joyce Brothers, in Reader's Digest, March 1986. Cohabitation produces attitudes leading to superficial communication and uncommitted decision-making for marriage. — University of Chicago and University of Michigan 23-year study by sociologists William C. Axinn and Arland Thorton.

"The wedding's coming up and we're trying to save money by living together."

Some money can possibly be saved. However, persons can still spend their own money extravagantly. They often fail to really plan and save for the future, and belatedly discover that by not fully "casting their lot with each other," they in fact shortchange themselves and their relationship. Short-term savings are less important than investing in a lifetime relationship. — "When Unmarried Couples Live Together."

"Because of the way things are today, we want to see if it will work out."

On the surface, it may seem to make sense that living together on a trial basis would help screen out less compatible couples. However, couples living together before marriage actually have a 50 percent greater chance of divorce than those who don't. Living together before marriage is different from living together in marriage because there is no binding commitment to support the relationship.

Question: Isn't the church making too much of the sexual stuff, which is really our private business anyway?

Answer: The gift of the body in sexual intercourse is a real symbol of the giving of the whole

person. In it, husband and wife are saying to one another in "body language" what they said to each other at the altar on their wedding day: "I am yours, for life!" While sexual union is meant to be both physically pleasurable and emotionally fulfilling, it is, above all, the deepest sign of the complete gift of self that a husband and wife pledge to each other. This mutual gift does not end with the couple, however, but rather makes them capable of becoming co-creators with God in giving life to a new human person. According to God's design, the gift of sexual union has two primary purposes: strengthening married love and sharing that love with the birth of children. Since marriage is the only "place" where this total self-giving between a man and a woman is made possible — and where children can be raised with the committed love of both a mother and a father — the church teaches that sexual intimacy is meant only for husband and wife. This is because the total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the fruit and sign of a total personal self-giving, made possible only in marriage. In other words, to give one's body to another person without first having given him or her one's whole self in marriage would be to express through the "language" of the body a unity which does not yet exist.

Question: Why does the church always bring up scandal with regard to living together? Many of our friends are or have been doing the same thing!

Answer: As humans, we never act in a vacuum. All of our moral choices, good as well as bad, ripple through our families, friends and communities. Thus, when a couple chooses to live together before marriage, the church cannot overlook it.

This is because it can be commonly assumed sexual relations are taking place within this situation. In this regard, the church teaches, "Fornication is carnal (sexual) union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young." — Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2353.

And from sacred Scripture, we are taught by St. Paul that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

The choice of a couple to cohabit is one that is not simply made in isolation between two people. It affects everyone in relationship with the two people — parents, brothers, sisters, friends and even other members of the parish — and therefore can become a source of scandal to all involved. By choosing to live together before marriage, the couple implicitly is communicating to all who know them that there is nothing wrong with this action when, in fact, there is. For example, this can be especially misleading to young nieces, nephews and children of friends whose moral reasoning could be misled by the example of the adults they look up to.

Question: What is the best way to prepare spiritually for marriage?

Answer: Catholic Engaged Encounter has a saying, "A wedding is for a day, but a marriage is for a lifetime." The church is concerned for the future good and growth of Christian marriages. The best way to get ready for marriage, if you are a Catholic, is to practice your faith. Catholics do this by celebration of weekly Sunday Mass, by reception of the sacrament of reconciliation (confes-

sion), through prayer, and by practicing works of justice and charity. If you have been away from the practice of attending the Eucharist regularly, the priest will want to see you return to participating in the Eucharist every Sunday. If it has been a long time since your last confession, the priest will help you. During the days of preparation, you are strongly encouraged to pray together as a couple, read Scripture and lead a virtuous life. For guidance, look to other couples with strong Christian values.

Question: As a Catholic, do I really have to buy into all of the church's expectations about Mass attendance and those other things?

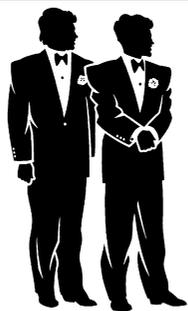
Answer: The church sees the vocation of marriage as being bigger than just the man and woman involved. In fact, married life has a special grace flowing through it by which the life of the married couple is called to mirror the love and commitment Jesus Christ made to each of us, a promise we interpret as being "our salvation."

That's why we dare to say marriage is a sacrament, a living sign of God's promise to help us love as well as God has loved us.

Question: Why does the Catholic Church get so involved in our wedding? Isn't it up to the bride and groom to make these choices?

Answer: The church wants to prepare you not just for the wedding day but for your married life. We see it as a vocational commitment that has an impact on you and the whole church.

To obtain a copy of these guidelines in booklet form contact the Office of Family Life at the South Bend Chancery by calling (574) 234-0687 or visit the Web site: www.diocesefwsb.org/FAMILY.



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FAQ

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

FAQ: What does the church approve? How can I learn more?

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 rates of 98-99 percent. To learn more, visit the diocesan Web site at www.diocesefwsb.org/FAMILY/nfp.

FAQ: Are there videos or diocesan training on these issues?

Office of Family Life: The diocesan Office of Family Life has produced a DVD called "Beginning and End of Life Issues: Seeking Divine Wisdom and a booklet called Faith and Fertility: What the Church Teaches and Why," which present the church's teaching on responsible parenthood, contraception and infertility. Both are available through the Cathedral Bookstore in Fort Wayne, (260) 422-4611. Natural Family Planning classes are available throughout the diocese. See the diocesan Web site at www.diocesefwsb.org/FAMILY for the complete schedule of diocesan classes. The Couple to Couple League (www.ccli.org for a list of local teachers) and Creighton Model Services (ctschartgen1980@hotmail.com) also offer Natural Family Planning classes in the Fort Wayne area, while the Natural Family Planning

Program of St. Joseph County (nfpstjoseph@catholic.org) offers classes in the South Bend area.

FAQ: If we have infertility issues, what does the church say about in vitro fertilization?

Office of Family Life: The church teaches the sexual union of spouses is the only setting worthy of the conception of a new human person. This is because the dignity of a child demands that he or she be given life through a personal act that expresses the total self-giving of his or her parents. While medical interventions, which assist marital intercourse to achieve conception are morally good, reproductive technologies, which replace or substitute for marital relations, are morally wrong. Since in vitro fertilization (IVF) achieves conception by having technicians join sperm and ova in a laboratory petri dish, rather than through the loving sexual embrace of husband and wife, this widely used procedure is seriously wrong. In addition, the practice of IVF commonly involves the creation of "spare" embryos which are then destroyed, donated or frozen for future use.

NaPro Technology is a new approach to diagnosing and treating infertility that is completely ethical and much more effective than IVF. Contact the diocesan Office of Family Life, (574) 234-0687 for a list of health care professionals in our diocese who have been trained to provide NaPro Technology.



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The sacramental aspect of marriage must be given top priority

Diocese provides marriage prep and diocesan guidelines

BY DIANE FREEBY

SOUTH BEND — As Catholics, we are aware that preparing for a wedding is much more than booking the church and reserving a reception hall. Amidst the excitement of ordering invitations and flowers, the sacramental aspect of marriage must be given top priority. The Office of Family Life offers a way for the engaged couple to fulfill the diocesan requirements, which will be updated this spring.

The initial process begins at the parish level and involves some paperwork, such as producing affidavits of freedom to marry from parents or others close to the couple, as well as baptismal certificates issued within the last six months.

An engaged couple must also complete a questionnaire often

2009 Diocesan Conferences for Engaged Couples

Fort Wayne	South Bend
Feb. 21	March 21
April 25	May 23
June 27	Oct. 10
Nov. 14	

called a premarital inventory. This helps the priest or pastoral minister to identify areas of disagreement that require further discussion.

An engaged couple must also participate in a formal program of marriage preparation offered by the diocese. As of May 1, 2009, all couples who have yet to fulfill their marriage preparation requirement will need to attend the daylong Conference for Engaged Couples.

According to Lisa Everett, who co-directs the Office of Family Life along with her husband Fred, this may be followed up in many parishes by one or two sessions with a host couple or pastoral minister.

“Our office will provide training for those couples who might be interested in helping with this ministry,” says Everett. “The conference offers us a chance to provide engaged couples with a wide range of information, while the follow-up sessions are designed to provide more personal attention.”

The diocesan conferences are all-day Saturday events. The Everetts will give talks on the meaning of married love, communication and intimacy and partnership in marriage. They will also provide a Natural Family Planning overview and a talk introducing theology of the body. In the past, Father Bob Lengenrich, associate pastor at

St. Pius X in Granger, has given a dynamic Power Point presentation on the spirituality of marriage and family. Whether it's Father Lengenrich or another priest giving the talk, the spirituality of marriage and family will be presented at each conference.

Another featured speaker is Lisa Marino, RCIA director at St. Matthew Cathedral Parish in South Bend. She is enthusiastic about sharing Pope John Paul II's teachings on sexuality and married love.

“It's important for engaged couples to learn about theology of the body because this is the most comprehensive way the church teaches about the gift of self that spouses make to each other in the sacrament of marriage,” explains Marino. “It challenges couples to see Christ as the source and center of their marriage, which in turn will allow them to go deeper with their gift of self.”

Marino says the response has been “surprised interest” since the teaching seems to be relatively new to most couples.

“At the same time, I notice that as I advance through the 50-minute talk, the couples' interest seems to continue to increase, not decrease,” adds Marino. “This teaching on marriage really cuts through a lot of the lies the culture sells the young dating and engaged couples, and the couples are left with making the choice of either believing ‘the world’ or ‘The Word Made Flesh.’”

Marino's advice to couples considering marriage: “Pray together regularly and seek a radical openness to God's will in their lives through reflection on Christ's nuptial love for us on the Cross. I would also advise couples build their relationship on a solid sacramental spirituality; to begin or continue the practice of monthly confession and attending weekday Mass whenever possible, in addition to regular Sunday Mass.”

The conferences take place at the Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne or at the Century Center in South Bend and are sponsored by the Office of Family Life. For more information, call (574) 234-0687.

Muslims, Catholics may face obstacles when trying to intermarry

BY REGINA LINSKEY

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Father Philip Latronico, a priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, N.J., remembers the unbridled love of a couple he once married. Seemingly driven by destiny, the two had been friends since high school, and life kept bringing them back together.

“No matter what happened, they kept coming back to each other,” said Father Latronico.

When they were ready for marriage, the groom-to-be came to Father Latronico for help and advice: He was Catholic and his fiancée was Muslim.

The marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man is controversial if not illegal in Islam. If a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, her family and the Muslim community must cut ties with her.

Father Latronico, executive secretary of the Archdiocese of Newark's interreligious and Christian unity offices since 1993, has experience managing the delicate situation an interfaith relationship can present.

For this couple, who asked that their names not be used, Father Latronico drew up the marriage contract and married the couple in a garden, rather than in a church

or a mosque. The bride wore traditional Pakistani gowns and her hands were dotted with henna.

“The personal love of each other is so strong ... it overcame the barrier of the two faiths” and they knew “God would accept what they were doing,” said Father Latronico.

The priest also encouraged the bride to attend services at the mosque more frequently and urged the couple to talk openly about their faiths in the household.

Before they were wed, the couple agreed that when they had children the girls would be Muslim and the boys would be Catholic. Muslim women worship separately from men in a mosque, and the couple did not want their children to worship alone.

Up until the day of the wedding, imams who knew about the marriage tried to convince the bride not to marry a Catholic, said Father Latronico.

In an interfaith society such as the U.S., interfaith marriages are “something that Muslims are just starting to deal with,” he told Catholic News Service. “Islam is trying to adapt itself to the culture that they are in.”

Although the Catholic Church does not keep track of how many Catholic-Muslim marriages there are in the United States, the phe-



CNS photo/Bob Roller

Father Francis Tiso, associate director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, is pictured in Washington Jan. 29.

nomenon is becoming more common.

Father Francis Tiso, associate director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, explained some of the problems that can arise in such a marriage.

In the Muslim faith, rights of children belong to the husband. If the father is not Muslim, then the

children are not Muslim, regardless of the mother's faith. At the same time, the Catholic Church teaches that parents have the responsibility to raise their children as Catholics.

The situation is further complicated when a mixed marriage with children ends in divorce. Under Muslim law, the father takes the children. If the man decides to leave the country, he can leave with the children.

Angelina Esteban, a Catholic from Birmingham, Mich., has experienced some of the difficulties that can come with being engaged to a Muslim. Her fiancée, Yousef Alriashi, is from Yemen and, although the couple share many things, such as an appreciation of their equally conservative upbringings, Alriashi's parents are not supportive of their future nuptials.

Alriashi offered to have a Catholic wedding and agreed to raise their children Catholic because of Esteban's devotion to her faith.

However, Esteban said she has met some challenges from her local parish, where the couple are preparing to marry. Even before the engagement, her parish priest discouraged the romance, she said, warning that Muslims “are very male-oriented and that my children would have to be

Muslim.”

To marry in the Catholic Church, Esteban and Alriashi must complete a lot of paperwork. Esteban said Alriashi must file papers detailing his relationship with his mother, father and siblings and had to attend several marriage preparation courses without Esteban. The priest told them they could not even pick a wedding date until they had been engaged for a year.

“I love my church and I love my religion, but at first I was angry that I couldn't get married (as easily and quickly) like my parents and cousins got married,” she said.

Alriashi was in an arranged marriage when he was a young teenager, and Esteban's parish requires documentation of his divorce in Yemen. But when Alriashi went back to Yemen to retrieve the papers, he met with resistance from his family, said Esteban.

When Alriashi went to the government office for the papers he was put in jail over a scuffle with an official who was demanding a \$2,000 bribe for his services. His father refused to bail him out until Alriashi promised he would not marry Esteban. After a month, he lied to his father so he

Worldwide Marriage Encounter strongly supports For Your Marriage initiative

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. — Strong support for the Catholic Church's For Your Marriage initiative was announced last year by the National Secretariat of Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME).

"It is our belief that vibrant, long lasting and dedicated marriages can and do exist and that married couples are seeking to make their good marriages, great marriages. The focus of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops on supporting and helping to foster good marriage principles is an effort that we all need to get behind and encourage," said Tony and Cathy Witzak and Father Emile Frishe, the WWME National Secretariat Ecclesial Team.

The new USCCB marriage initiative has many facets with one of the key elements being its www.foryourmarriage.org Web site. The Web site contains much useful information and tips, stories and ideas to keep marriages alive and healthy. There has also been a strong emphasis on public service announcements and other related programs.

"It is our hope and dream that through this effort, along with Worldwide Marriage

Encounter's focus on supporting marriages, that married couples will see the beauty in their relationships and let others observe that happy, healthy marriages are flourishing throughout the United States," the national secretariat team said.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekends start on a Friday evening and end on Sunday afternoon. Couples hear a presentation by a couple and priest and are asked to write down their thoughts and feelings, then go to share in the privacy of their room. There is no group discussion. Weekends are held in various locations including hotels and retreat centers.

There is a cost for the weekend, but in the 40-year history of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, no couple has ever been turned away from attending a weekend because of lack of money.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter is a nonprofit organization and all donations from the weekend are used to continue offering additional weekends throughout the country and the world.

Married couples who want to learn more about making their "good marriages, better" can find Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekends that are presented all over the United States.

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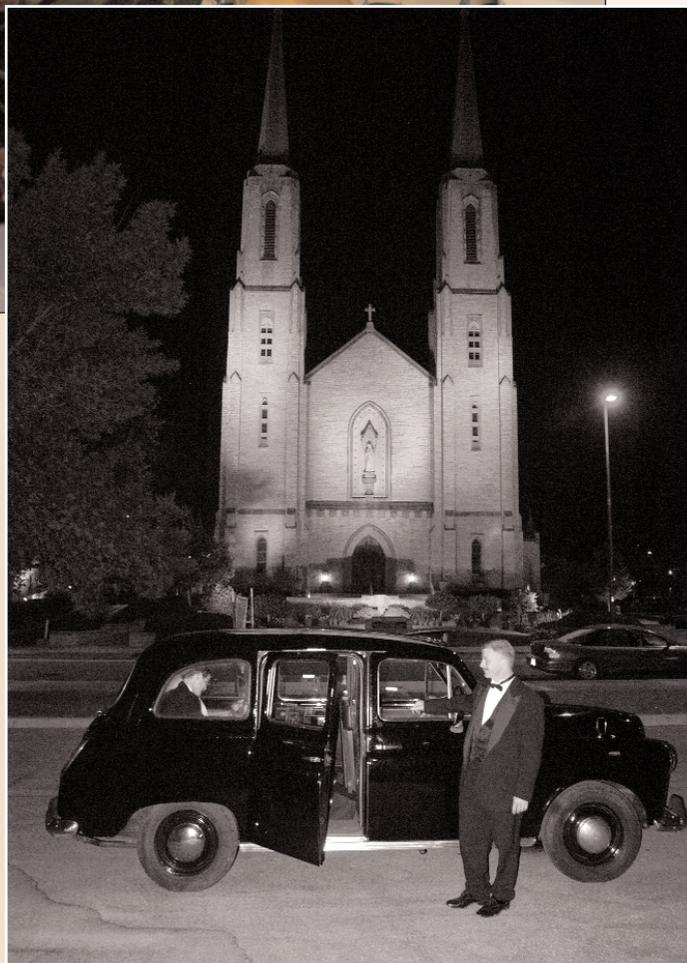
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MUSLIM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

could get out of jail in time to catch his flight home to the U.S. He never got the divorce papers.

Muslims in the Middle East “see American women ... (as) not submissive to their husbands ... and as loose sexually,” Esteban said. They learn about American women from the movies, which is “partly why the Middle East sees the West as though we have no morals,” Esteban explained.

Esteban and Alriashi know they will need to compromise. They have agreed to disagree about certain things such as Jesus and pork.

“I know they (Muslims) pray five times a day, and I laugh, saying I pray all the time,” Esteban

said.

In an effort to provide a resource to Catholic and Muslim

leaders, marriage preparation personnel and interfaith couples on the subject of mixed marriages, the Mid-Atlantic Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims created a document, “Marriage: Catholic and Sunni Muslim Perspectives,” scheduled to be published this year. Sunni Muslims form the largest branch of Islam.

The document has a section — written by Catholics — that addresses how Catholics define marriage. Similarly, the section on how Muslims define marriage is written by Muslims. Father Tiso said this is unique, in that there is not much written in English by Muslims on the subject of marriage.

The document says both Catholics and Muslims believe that marriage is a blessing from

God between a man and a woman and that families “play a pivotal role in providing an environment in which faith may be nurtured.”

“While Catholics and Muslims hold many things differently, they nonetheless agree on many important features of marriage and family life,” it says.

When asked if there is an ideal interfaith marriage — from the perspective of Islam or Catholicism — Father Tiso answered, “No.”

Although a perfect interfaith marriage from both faiths’ point of view would be “difficult to imagine,” both faiths tolerate interfaith marriages, he said.

“I know they (Muslims)
pray five times a day, and I
laugh, saying
I pray all the time.”

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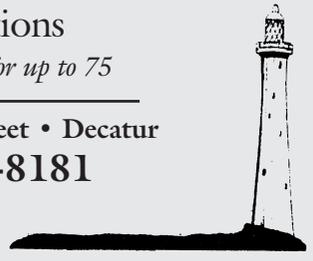

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Living together before marriage:

A look at the facts

BY LISA EVERETT

Fact No. 1: The percentage of couples who live together before marriage has increased dramatically in the past several decades.

According to Dr. David Popenoe, professor of sociology at Rutgers University and co-director of the National Marriage Project, "The practice of cohabitation has grown enormously. As of 2002, over 50 percent of women ages 19 to 44 had cohabited for a portion of their lives, compared to 33 percent in 1987 and virtually none 100 years ago. And it should come as no surprise that at the same time cohabitation rates have skyrocketed, marriage rates have plummeted."

In his 2008 report (available at <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/NMP2008CohabitationReport.pdf>), Popenoe analyzes the reasons behind this rising trend: "To a large extent, cohabitation is an offshoot of the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s, a revolution, which essentially gave premarital sex a social stamp of approval. Even more importantly, it was a time when relatively reliable birth control for women first became available, followed soon by the legalization of abortion. These revolutionary changes greatly diminished the age-old problem of unwanted pregnancy for unmarried women. With women now socially permitted to have sex before marriage, far more women became sexually available to men and men no longer had to marry to regularize their sexual lives. Men reacted by pulling back from marriage and from having children, expanding their now notorious 'inability to commit.' This gradually took the form not just of having regular

sex outside of marriage but of actually living with one's sexual partner in non-marital cohabitation."

Fact No. 2: Young adults whose parents have divorced are much more likely to cohabit.

While couples cohabit for different reasons, including financial concerns and convenience, research conducted by Duquesne University's Family Institute found that young adults of divorced parents have the highest rates of cohabitation. David Popenoe explains the logic behind this statistic: "Children of divorce are much more likely to cohabit because they have a fear of breakup. They like the trial marriage idea." Since 1970, 42 million people have seen their parents divorce. "Today's couples in their 20s and 30s distrust marriage," conclude Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee in *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25-Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000 [17]).

Fact No. 3: Most couples who cohabit do not eventually marry.

In the 1970s, 60 percent of cohabiting couples eventually married, whereas only 33 percent of cohabiting couples eventually married in the 1990s. (Andrew Cherlin, "The Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (Nov. 2004): 849. [14]) According to a study conducted by Ohio State University sociologist Sharon Sassler and University of Michigan sociologist James McNally, nearly 60 percent of couples who currently live together before marriage do not go on to marry,

Fact No. 4: Couples who lived together before marriage report lower rates of marital satisfaction than couples who do not cohabit.

A study of over 300 new-

wed couples by the National Council on Family Relations found that those who cohabited first were less happy in their marriages. Women in particular complained about the quality of communication after the wedding. A study by researchers Alfred DeMars and Gerald Leslie (1984) found that those who live together prior to marriage scored lower on tests rating satisfaction with their marriages than couples who did not cohabit. Another study by Dr. Joyce Brothers showed that cohabitation has a negative affect on the quality of a subsequent marriage (Scott 1994).

Fact No. 5: Couples who live together before marriage are much more likely to divorce than couples who do not cohabit.

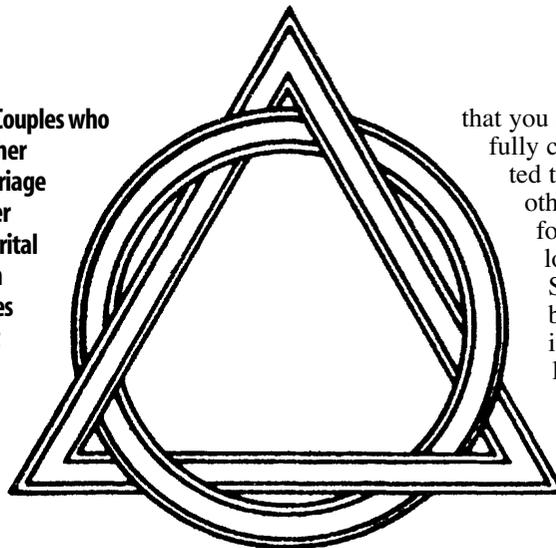
According to research by David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead ("Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage," 1999), couples who cohabit are almost 50 percent more likely to divorce than couples who marry without cohabiting first.

This statistic should come as no surprise, comments Popenoe: "One big reason for cohabiting is

that you are not fully committed to the other person for the long-term. So breakup is more likely." In their

people who already are more divorce prone. They may be less committed to traditional family values, less inclined toward or more tentative regarding long-term relationships, and may have personality traits that make them less suitable as marriage partners. A second reason involves the actual experience of cohabitation, that is, attitudes and behaviors developed through cohabitation may be inimical to long-term marriage. For example, cohabitation may generate the attitude that relationships are mainly for the purpose of testing compatibility, an attitude poisonous to long-term marriages. A third reason is that cohabiting couples, compared to dating couples, often find it harder to break up due to the greater complications of household and financial as well as emotional matters. They therefore may drift through inertia into inappropriate marriages, only to break up farther down the line."

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



book, "The Case for Marriage," co-authors Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher make the same point, adding that one of cohabitation's biggest attractions is the ability to make an "easy exit."

In his 2008 report, David Popenoe analyzes the reasons behind this sociological statistic: "Many studies in the U.S. have shown that couples who cohabit before marriage have a higher risk of divorce when they do marry. Several reasons have been put forth to account for this. One is that it is mostly due to selectivity; that is, those people who are willing to cohabit are the same

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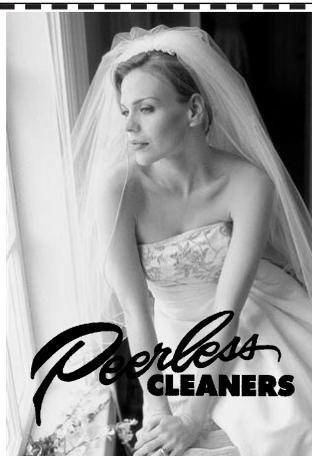
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Romance is in the air:

Films on DVD just in time for Valentine's Day

BY HARRY FORBES
AND JOHN MULDERIG

NEW YORK (CNS) — Just in time for Valentine's Day, Warner Home Video has, in one fell swoop, released two groupings of films the company has labeled as "romance." The first group — available only individually — have some literary distinction; the second group — a boxed set of four films in the glossy, soap-opera vein — is, despite the genre, not without interest.

The "All-Star Romance" bunch gives us adaptations of John Steinbeck, Thomas Hardy, James Hilton and Robert Sherwood, and an original from renowned playwright Terence Rattigan.

The so-called "Romance Classics Collection" features early 1960s idol Troy Donahue as the star of all four films, but perhaps it was felt his name meant little in today's market. And of further interest, three of the four showcase the work of underrated director Delmer Daves. Observed today from a purely cinematic and sociological perspective, the films are of rather more interest than the original disparaging reviews below would indicate.

Trailers aside, the films are presented pretty much bare-bones, but the transfers are all excellent, in the Warner custom.

None have been rated by the Motion Picture Association of America, except "Cannery Row" and "Goodbye, Mr. Chips."

"All-Star Romance" (1940-1982; sold singly)

"Cannery Row" (1982)

A marine biologist with a troubled past (Nick Nolte) pursues an irascible romance with a drifter turned reluctant prostitute (Debra Winger), amid the antics of the eccentric hobos (led by M. Emmet Walsh) who populate the depressed titular district of mid-20th century Monterey, Calif. Writer-director David S. Ward's adaptation of two Steinbeck novels, narrated by John Huston, is warmly atmospheric and portrays the scientist as intent on rescuing his love from her newly chosen lifestyle, but it also sees him in an adulterous affair. Prostitution theme, adultery, obscured partial nudity, sexual references, a few crass words, and at least a dozen uses of profanity. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

"Far From the Madding Crowd" (1967)

Excellent British screen version of Thomas Hardy's romantic melodrama of early Victorian country life with Julie Christie being pursued by Peter Finch, Terence Stamp and Alan Bates. Director John Schlesinger avoids the pitfalls of the formula blockbuster and comes up with a superbly realistic, atmospheric production filmed entirely on location in Hardy's home county, Dorset. The DVD features three additional minutes only seen in the film's European release. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults.

"Goodbye, Mr. Chips" (1969)

Musical version of the Hilton novel with Peter O'Toole as the distracted, unbending schoolmaster who is set upon, conquered and finally humanized by a music hall performer (Petula Clark). Director Herbert Ross shifts the focus from the academic to the happy marriage of such unlikely opposites, with pleasant songs by Leslie Bricusse pacing an old-fashioned romance. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences. All ages admitted.

"Waterloo Bridge" (1940)

Sentimental romantic tragedy of World War I as a Scottish captain (Robert Taylor) and a London ballet student (Vivien Leigh) fall in love, but before they can wed he's sent to the front, then reported dead. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy from Robert E. Sherwood's play, the moody photography and a strong supporting cast (notably Lucile Watson and Virginia Field) are pluses. Romantic complications, veiled treatment of prostitution and suicide. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults.

"The Yellow Rolls-Royce" (1965)

Slickly elegant romantic melodrama in which the automobile of the title passes from an English aristocrat (Rex Harrison) in Ascot to an American gangster (George C. Scott) in Florence and a Scandinavian heiress (Ingrid Bergman) in Yugoslavia. Written by Rattigan, and directed by

Anthony Asquith, the film's third tale is the only one that has any weight. Sexual situations and some stylized violence. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is L — limited adult audience, films whose problematic content many adults would find troubling.

"Warner Bros. Romance Classics Collection" (1961-1963; boxed set)

"Palm Springs Weekend" (1963)

Dated romantic comedy set in the title's desert resort where Easter-vacationing college students (Donahue, Jerry Van Dyke, Connie Stevens and others) team up with a movie stuntman (Ty Hardin), a troubled playboy (Robert Conrad) and the local police chief's daughter (Stefanie Powers). Directed by Norman Taurog, the formula plot has no surprises. Stylized violence with a youth gang and sexual situations. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults.

"Parish" (1961)

Potboiler in which a young man (Donahue) goes to work for the Connecticut tobacco grower (Karl Malden) whom his mother (Claudette Colbert) has married, then quits the job with his unscrupulous stepfather to work for his less wealthy but more honorable rival (Dean Jagger). Directed by Daves, the soapy proceedings are awash in inept plotting, overripe acting and unconvincing situations. Sexual situations and innuendo. The USCCB Office for Film &

Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults

"Rome Adventure" (1962)

Romantic clunker about a young American (Suzanne Pleshette) in Rome to see the sights while looking for a job, then finds true love with an art student (Donahue) until his former flame (Angie Dickinson) turns up to reclaim him. Writer-director Daves pours on the treacle shamelessly, but the camera loves the beautiful Italian landscapes and grand cultural monuments. Romantic complications and sexual innuendo. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults.

"Susan Slade" (1961)

Slick sudser about a young woman (Stevens) whose lover dies, leaving her pregnant, and then her parents (Dorothy McGuire and Lloyd Nolan) try to avoid a scandal by pretending the baby is their own until their unhappy daughter is courted by a rich man's son (Bert Convy) and a struggling would-be novelist (Donahue). Directed by Daves, the soapy proceedings feature much hollow moralizing in plush San Francisco surroundings. The tangled consequences of a pre-marital affair. The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-III — adults.

Harry Forbes is director and John Mulderig is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. More reviews are available online at www.usccb.org/movies.

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Marriage licensing rules and regulations

BY KAY COZAD

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 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: Credit cards are NOT accepted.

- **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 for 60 days with no waiting period to marry after issued.**

- **License is valid state-wide.**

- **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, common law and same-sex 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.

Pope cautions tribunals against granting annulments too easily

BY CINDY WOODEN

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Granting marriage annulments too easily and without real cause plays into a modern form of pessimism that basically says human beings are not able to make lifelong commitments to loving another person, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"We run the risk of falling into an anthropological pessimism which, in the light of today's cultural situation, considers it almost impossible to marry," the pope said in a speech Jan. 29 to members of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota.

The tribunal mainly deals with appeals filed in marriage annulment cases.

Pope Benedict said there is still a need to deal with a problem Pope John Paul II pointed out in a 1987 speech to the Roman Rota, that of saving the church community from "the scandal of seeing the value of Christian marriage destroyed in practice by the exaggerated and almost automatic multiplication of declarations of nullity."

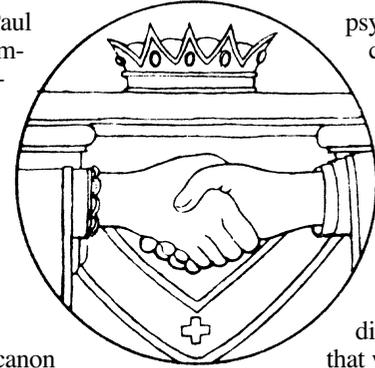
Pope Benedict said he agreed

with Pope John Paul that too often members of church tribunals see a failed marriage and grant the annulment on the basis of an ill-defined case of "immaturity or psychic weakness."

According to canon law, the validity of a marriage requires that both the man and woman freely and publicly consent to the union and that they have the psychological capacity to assume the obligations of marriage.

Pope Benedict said tribunal judges must remember there is a difference between the full maturity and understanding that people should strive to develop over time and "canonical maturity, which is the minimum point of departure for the validity of a marriage."

In addition, he said, granting an annulment on the basis of the "psychic incapacity" of the husband or wife requires that the tribunal establish and document the fact that the person had a serious



psychological or psychiatric problem at the time the wedding was celebrated.

In defending the permanent and sacramental nature of marriage, tribunals are not making life difficult for couples that want to split up, the pope said.

Defending the marriage bond gives witness to the fact that the ability to love and to pledge oneself to another forever is part of human nature, he said.

The church's insistence that it is possible for the vast majority of people to make a lasting commitment to marriage can help couples "discover the natural reality of marriage and the importance it has in the plan of salvation," Pope Benedict said.

It is true that human nature is limited and imperfect, but that does not mean that people, "exercising human freedom supported by grace," cannot make a commitment to loving each other and raising a family together, he said.



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Pope says Christians need to promote life, traditional families

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Today more than ever, Christian families need to pay witness to and promote the irreplaceable value of life and the family based on marriage between a man and a woman, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"The best service that we Christians can offer today's society," the pope said, is being "people who are free and rich with human and Gospel values and who are on a journey toward holiness."

The traditional family is "an indispensable foundation of society and peoples as well as an irreplaceable good for children who deserve to come

into the world as a fruit of love and the total and generous giving of the parents," he said at the end of the Sixth World Meeting of Families, which took place Jan. 14-18 in Mexico City.

The pope made his comments via satellite from the Vatican Jan. 18 after a closing Mass at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Mass was celebrated by the pope's envoy, Vatican Secretary of

State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

"Today more than ever, there is a need for the witness and public commitment of all Christians to reaffirm the dignity and the unique and irreplaceable value of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman," he said.

Christians also need to show that they are open to life at all its stages, he said.

Every Christian must help promote "legislative and administrative measures" that support the traditional family and their "inalienable rights," he said.

The pope said the family, "founded on indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman, is the expression of this relational, filial and communal aspect of

life. It is the setting where men and women are enabled to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner."

But families' efforts to be a true school of humanity and perennial values are being hindered by "a deceptive concept of freedom," the pope said.

This false sense of freedom, he said, glorifies whims and individual impulses "to the point of leav-

ing everyone locked up in the prison of his or her own 'I.'"

"True human freedom comes from having been created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, should be exercised with responsibility, always opting for the true good so that it becomes love, the gift of self," the pope said.

Real love and closeness among family members are needed more than ideals or theories, he added.

It is through one's concrete experience in the home "that one learns to truly live and value life and health, freedom and peace, justice and truth, work, harmony and respect," he said.

Pope Benedict also said his prayers were with families who are facing the trials of poverty, illness, isolation and separation because of migration, as well as those families being persecuted for their Christian faith.

He encouraged large families who are oftentimes criticized or not understood by others yet are giving "an example of generosity and faith in God."

He urged families to pray together, especially the rosary, and to build their faith on listening to the word of God and working to incorporate Gospel values concretely in their lives.

At the end of his speech, the pope announced the next World Meeting of Families would be held in Milan, Italy, in 2012 on the theme "The Family: Work and Play."

**"Today more than ever,
there is a need for the
witness and public
commitment
of all Christians"**

POPE BENEDICT XVI



CNS PHOTO/HENRY ROMERO, REUTERS

Pope Benedict XVI, pictured on a jumbo screen, gives an address via live satellite broadcast during the closing Mass of the Sixth World Meeting of Families at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City Jan. 18.



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TENTS • BRIDAL • INFLATABLES

Low-budget film creates stir among Catholic marriage advocates

BY MARILYN LAMFORD

ROGERS, Ark. (CNS) — The film “Fireproof” is causing a stir in Catholic marriage advocacy groups around the country.

The movie, produced on a \$500,000 budget, has become a hit around the country, first appearing in 839 theaters when it was released Sept. 26. As of Oct. 23, the movie had shown in 905 theaters and grossed \$21.5 million, more than 40 times its budget. The film was released on DVD Jan. 27

The Rev. Michael Catt, senior pastor at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., and executive producer of the film, spoke about the project at an event in Rogers Oct. 16 and in an interview with KDUA radio from St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers.

“Fireproof” tells the story of a firefighter and his struggles to save his marriage. A book, “The Love Dare,” which was originally a plot device in the film, was a No. 1 best-seller on The New York Times’ paperback advice books list.

In promoting the film, Rev. Catt said, “We learned — take it to the people. We didn’t have a multi-

million-dollar advertising budget. We had grass-roots word of mouth. We are very grateful for the support the Catholic Church has given us.

“I think anything that can impact marriages is a positive thing,” he added. “If we can save a million marriages this year, the ripple effect on children who will not be from broken homes, who will not be abused, who will not be growing up in homes where Mom and Dad are yelling and screaming, that will have an effect on our culture — it will have an effect on our churches.”

On a related “Fireproof” Web site, www.fireproofmymarriage.com, are links to Catholic marriage resources such as the Archdiocese of Chicago Family Ministries, Retrouvaille, the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage.

According to Frank Hannigan, director of family ministries for the Archdiocese of Chicago, the film has had great popularity in the Catholic community because of its pro-marriage, faith-filled message.

“When marriage is under such an attack, to have in the popular

medium a movie like ‘Fireproof’ was a wonderful gift for us,” he said. “We hope it will be something that will help couples strengthen their marriages.”

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., chairman of the bishops’ Subcommittee on Marriage and Family Life, endorsed “Fireproof,” saying the film portrayed, in a “convincing and realistic way, ... how a married couple was able to honor their marriage in the context of how easy it is today for couples to walk away from this commitment in the midst of incredibly hectic and complicated lives.”

“In the end it is clear that their faith in God is central,” he added. “While this is not a film with a uniquely Catholic theological perspective, I believe that the core message is one that can be profitably received by Catholic married couples and ultimately all married couples.”

The USCCB’s Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.



CNS photo/Goldwyn

Kirk Cameron stars in a scene from the movie “Fireproof.” The USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG.

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YouTube messages in English, Spanish offer church's view on marriage

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As U.S. voters from coast to coast prepared to decide ballot questions related to same-sex marriage Nov. 4, the U.S. bishops took their campaign to keep the traditional definition of marriage as the union of a man and woman to a popular video-sharing Web site, YouTube.

A version of the video in English, online at www.youtube.com, features Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' recently created Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Marriage.

Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of

San Antonio, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, presents the same message in Spanish online at www.youtube.com

Both videos also can viewed on the USCCB Web site at www.usccb.org.

The videos were posted online just before Election Day, when voters in California, Arizona and Florida were to face ballot questions that would define marriage as between one woman and one man. Connecticut bishops also have asked Catholics in their state to support a constitutional convention proposal on the ballot, so that a recent state decision permitting

same-sex marriage there could be reconsidered.

"Certain groups and individuals are trying to make same-sex unions the equivalent of marriage," the archbishops said in their videos. "This is a false idea being proposed and, in some cases, imposed by a minority. This is nothing less than the radical redefinition of marriage — denying the truth that it is exclusively the union of a man and a woman."

The messages warn that if successful "this effort of redefining marriage to include same-sex unions will bring confusion to what marriage actually means. This confusion could spread and



CNS PHOTO

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., and Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of San Antonio, are pictured in a screen grab from a video on YouTube. In the video they talk about the U.S. bishops' concerns about same-sex unions and their support for traditional marriage.

have enormous legal consequences for the rearing of children, public education, employment and religious freedom.

"Children would be forced to learn that marriage is merely one

kind of loving relationship among many," they said. "Churches would be prevented from witnessing to and teaching about the necessary and singular role of love between a man and a woman.

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Source: U.S. Census and The Official Catholic Directory

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