A Catholic wedding checklist

BY KAY COZAD

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

The informative website, www.foryourmarriage.org, offers by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), a plethora of information on Church teachings concerning the sacrament of Marriage and all that it entails. It states, “In the Catholic Church, Marriage is a sacrament. All sacraments are to be celebrated because they are encounters with Jesus Christ. A wedding celebrates Christ’s gift of marital love to this particular man and woman. It is a time for rejoicing.”

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

Twelve months prior to the wedding

• Select a church. Some parishes require one member of the couple to be a registered member.
• Meet with the pastor or deacon to select a wedding date and time, and discuss the parish requirements for a wedding celebration. Many parishes have wardrobe restrictions, including requiring the bride to cover her shoulders during the wedding.
• Choose one of three Rites of Marriage to celebrate: Wedding celebration within a Mass for two Catholics; celebration without Mass, structured around the Liturgy of the Word when a Catholic marries a baptized Christian; and celebration without Mass when a Catholic marries a non-Christian.

Nine months prior to the wedding

• Select readings (traditionally, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and one from the Gospels) and Prayers of the Faithful from the approved texts.

A note about budgets

Developing a realistic budget for your wedding may seem a daunting task. Costs vary between regions but according to www.costofwedding.com “the majority of couples spend between $19,242 and $32,070 on weddings in the U.S.”

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

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

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

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-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!
Navigating the ‘newly married’ years

BY LISA EVERETT

The first few years of marriage are filled with opportunities and challenges that can set the stage for many years to come. As with any adventure, there are many thrills and joys, but there are also perils and pitfalls to navigate. This is evidenced by the fact that sadly, most divorces in our country occur for couples married less than five years. Get your marriage off on the right foot by following these six steps:

1. Learn your spouse’s ‘love languages’

One of the most helpful books for newly married couples is “The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts.” Based on his decades of experience counseling couples, author Gary Chapman proposes that there are five basic “love languages” through which people generally experience and express love: 1) words of affirmation; 2) acts of service; 3) receiving gifts; 4) quality time; and 5) physical touch. Most people, he has found, have a primary “love language” as well as a secondary one, and it is important for couples to know the dominant ways in which their spouse expresses and experiences love. You can go to the website www.5lovelanguages.com and take each a 10-15 minute profile to assess your own love language and share the results with one another. Thinking about the answers to the following questions can also give you a pretty good idea of your spouse’s primary love language: “Does he/she most often express love to others? What does he/she complain about most often? What does he/she request most often?”

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

It is crucial that during the first few years of marriage, a husband and wife cement their identity as a couple. This means that, while all of us are part of a wider circle of family and friends, when we marry our relationship with our spouse takes precedence. It also means that, while the opinions and advice of relatives, especially those of parents, should receive a respectful hearing, it should ultimately be the couple themselves who discuss things openly and make decisions. This is also the time to reflect on what gifts each of you has been given from your own background — family traditions and ethnic customs, special ways of celebrating holidays, styles of communicating, expressions of faith, prayer and service, etc. — and incorporate the best of both worlds into your own married life and one day pass on to your children.

3. Make your marriage the priority over work and other commitments

Acquainted as we are in our culture to fast food, instant cash and TV remotes, many of us enter marriage with an expectation of instant gratification in our relationship with each other. But building a solid relationship takes work and it takes time. Especially in the first few years of marriage, we need to make quantities of quality time for each other. According to a national study conducted by Creighton University’s Center for Marriage and Family on the first five years of marriage, the number one problem reported by newly married couples was balancing job and family. According to director Michael Lawler, “Since dual-career marriages now represent about 60 percent of all marriages in America, this is not surprising. The difficulty of juggling jobs, couple-time together and parenting (if there are children) requires serious attention.”

Marriage calls for a complete gift of self between husband and wife. So a successful marriage cannot be a 50-50 proposition, where each spouse works to live out only his or her half of the bargain. Each spouse needs to strive to give 100 percent of the other. To make the complete gift of self they pledged on the altar a reality in daily life. This means that we have to work hard to make our marriage a success. It also means being willing to adjust schedules and to scale back on work and other commitments to ensure that we are spending enough time with each other. It may also mean curtailing time spent in front of the TV or on Facebook in order to have sufficient “face time” with our spouse. Begin early in your marriage to give each other the first fruits of your days and nights, rather than the crumbs of time leftover from work and individual pursuits.

4. Appreciate your differences and make them enrich your life together

St. Augustine once said of the moral life of Christians: “In what our union is unity. In what is dubious, liberty; and in everything, charity.” This is a good maxim to put into practice in marriage, especially in the early years. While it is essential that a husband and wife share the same vision of marriage as a complete gift of self for life that is open to children, there are many legitimate and even delightful differences that a husband and wife bring to their new life together. Discuss what gifts each of you bring to your marriage, beginning with your masculinity and femininity, and go on to look at your talents and temperaments, your interests and abilities. Try to see how they can complement each other rather than cause conflict between you, and how you can best put these different gifts at the service of each other and eventually, your children.

5. Practice constructive communication and conflict resolution

It may surprise some newlyweds to know that research has shown that 93 percent of communication in marriage is non-verbal. Over half of this non-verbal communication consists of body language, especially facial expressions, and almost half consists of tone of voice. This means that we can say a lot to our spouse, for better or worse, without even opening our mouths. But we also need to make time to converse with each other — every day to catch up and chat, and on a regular basis for more lengthy, serious discussions on topics that are important for our marriage. Especially in the latter context, it is important to cultivate an attitude of openness and receptivity to what my spouse is saying or sharing with me, including non-verbal cues. I must also be willing to share with my spouse, in a loving manner, what is truly on my mind and heart. It is good to begin a habit in the first year of marriage of trying to include in our communication with one another each of the elements traditionally used in prayer with God: praise, thanks, asking for forgiveness and asking for what we need. If these things form the substance of our conversation with God, it stands to reason that they also will nurture our communication with our spouse.

Communication between a husband and wife will occur continually develop into an argument, perhaps involving an angry confrontation. Keeping in mind the acronym H.A.L.T., will help minimize “escalation”: never have a serious discussion when either of you is Hungry, Angry, Loneliness, Tired or strapped for Time. When disagreements do arise, make sure to stay focused on the issue at hand. Don’t bring up other problems or reopen old discussions. Refrain from making accusations about each other’s motives and limit yourselves to discussing specific behaviors or actions that are bothering you. Avoid using emotional exaggerations like “always” and “never” and absolutely forego making personal attacks, whether emotional or physical. Even in the heat of emotion, make a commitment to let your words be tools with which to build rather than weapons with which to wound. Invite Christ into your conversation and ask Him to show you what course of action best serves the common good, regardless of who “wins.” And as Pope Francis told newly married couples during a visit to Assisi this past fall: “Argue as much as you want; if the plates start flying, so be it. But never let the day end without making peace. Never!”

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

Never forget the fact that Christ performed His first miracle at a wedding feast! This shows how highly He values the love between man and woman in marriage and want to grant it with His presence. When two baptized Christians come before the altar to be married, we not only make promises to one another — Christ makes a promise to us. Like a faithful friend, He promises to be with us for better and for worse, in good times and in bad, while our cup is overflowing and when the wine is running out.

Remember Christ’s encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Christ approached them and asked them what they were discussing as they went on their way, and they poured out their hearts to Him. Now imagine those two disciples as a husband and wife, traveling on their life’s journey, a journey that Christ has joined. “What are you discussing as you go on your way?” He asks. Letting Christ be part of our conversations as husband and wife is another word for “prayer.” We tell Him our hopes and dreams, our difficulties and struggles, our needs and our delights in our life together, we even ask to listen to His Word, whether that word comes to us in a passage from Scripture or in the silence of our hearts. When we invite Christ to stay with us, making time to talk to Him and listen to Him in prayer, meeting Him in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance — we will experience His presence in marvellous ways in our married lives.

Studies show that married couples that attend church services regularly have stronger marriages and are less likely to divorce than those who do not do so. These studies further show that couples that make shared prayer a regular part of their life together have even stronger marriages. For more resources and recommendations for navigating the newly married years, check out the USCCB website For Your Marriage at www.foryourmarriage.org.

Lisa Everett is the co-director of the Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.
Boy meets girl 66 years ago, Indiana style

I aimed my dad’s ’38 Chrysler between the ruts on the gravel road. “It’s just over the hill,” Marianne said. She was referring to her parents’ farmhouse on Mulberry Road. Marianne and I had met just a week ago on a blind date and I was going to meet her mom and dad for the first time.

I was so nervous when I pulled into their driveway I almost hit a tree. I couldn’t imagine that Marianne’s parents were going to be too impressed with the man their daughter was bringing home to meet the family. They were practicing Catholics, and although I was baptized a Catholic, I hadn’t seen the inside of a church since grade school. But I wasn’t all bad I reasoned ... I did have a steady job and was never in trouble with the law.

I must have passed their first test, because they asked me to stay for supper. It was a meal only farmwives knew how to fix— a mountain of mashed potatoes, gallons of brown gravy and wall-to-wall fried chicken. But I was too on edge to enjoy the meal. From the corner of my eye I could see Marianne’s brothers eyeing me and giggling. It was going to be a long night.

I was right. After supper, the whole family did a very strange thing. They all paraded into the living room and each person picked out a chair or section of sofa and knelt down. “We’re going to say the rosary now,” Marianne’s dad announced.

If he had said that we were all going to run barefoot through the barley, I couldn’t have been more surprised. I didn’t know how to react. Although he said, “we are going to say the rosary,” I wasn’t sure if he meant me too, and I was too flustered to ask. I thought of saying that I would wait in the kitchen, but something about that didn’t seem right. So I gulped a few times; picked out a chair next to Marianne and knelt down. It was the first time I had prayed in five years.

Looking back at that night, I can see in it an invitation from God to come home. I don’t think anyone would have thought the less of me if I had waited in the kitchen, but something (or Someone) inside of me wouldn’t let me do it. It was a moment of grace I could have refused. But God took my “yes” and changed the direction of my life.

In the last book of the Bible, Jesus tells us that He stands at the door of our life and knocks. The latch is on our side.

Editor’s note: On Oct. 23, 2014, Marianne and Don Grooms will celebrate their 66th wedding anniversary. They are members of St. Therese, Little Flower Parish, South Bend.
Teachings of Christ make possible a flourishing and happy society

BY FRED EVERETT

In what has become an often bitter and close-minded debate in Indiana and throughout the country about the very nature of marriage, we see playing out the final stages of a “paradigm shift” from what was once a Christian society to one that can be described as post-Christian secularist. From administration attacks on religious freedom to administration support for gay marriage to administration support for coerced funding of abortion and contraception, it would seem that a growing majority of our fellow Americans are either supportive of these policies or just shrug with indifference. We are not in Kansas anymore.

A recent article by New York Times columnist David Brooks drives this point home. He comments that in research on how the increasingly secular young perceive those who are devoutly faithful — whether Christian, Jew or some other faith — the words that most frequently come up in their descriptions include “judgmental,” “hypocritical,” “old-fashioned” and “out of touch.” Clearly, if this is what they believe characterizes believers, no wonder they are rejecting the Christian heritage upon which our nation was founded!

Of course, the irony is that what is being jettisoned in the name of freedom, love and happiness is in fact their greatest safeguard. The teachings of Christ on marriage and sexuality are not impediments to a flourishing and happy society; they actually liberate and deepen the love that makes it possible. Look at the daily news and ask yourself if all the stories of heartache, infidelity or betrayal are more likely the result of following the teachings of Christ or of abandoning them. Without question, it’s the latter.

Take, for example, the recent story of the cold dismissal of the First Lady of France. She and the President of France have been living together for several years and when her partner was elected as chief executive, she took over the role of First Lady. Unfortunately, her partner was also dating a younger actress on the side and when this was made public recently, the First Lady was curtly dismissed from her role during a presidential press conference. Off with her head!

Now, before this elicits too much sympathy for the now defunct First Lady, it is important to note that she herself was the president’s mistress during his marriage several years ago when he decided to abandon his wife and four children. It’s a tawdry story, but the reason for bringing it up is that even the French, known for their indifference to the “personal” lives of their politicians, are somewhat taken aback by the entire narcissistic spectacle. Yet, such a spectacle can easily be defended in terms of the freedom, love and happiness commonly trumpeted by politicians or celebrities. Sometimes, though, it is hard to just look away. I have often thought what the world would look like if everyone actually decided to follow the teachings of Christ on marriage and sexuality. For one, there would be no divorce since men and women would be resolved to grow in love and learn how to sacrifice for each other. There would be no rape or children conceived outside of wedlock since men and woman would be resolved to practice self-control and to wait until marriage to enter into the marital embrace. There would be no abortion as men and women would be resolved to welcome children into their marriages even under trying situations and in those situations where they needed to postpone a pregnancy, they would be resolved to respect the integral meaning of their marital embrace and use natural family planning.

In such a world, almost all children would grow up with a mother and a father and, even in those situations where a parent was lost under tragic circumstances, the community would offer its support and love in reaching out to the family. In such a world, children would be taught the importance of a deep reverence of God, a profound respect for the dignity of every human being, and a preferential love for the poor, the weak and the infirm. In such a world, humility, fidelity, purity, veracity and charity would be among the highest values. Somehow, this doesn’t sound all that terrible. What many of the secular young do not understand is that which lies at the heart of a true believer: an ardent love for God that transforms and deepens the beauty of life itself. In his article, David Brooks closes with a quotation from St. Augustine as to why God changes everything:

“It is not physical beauty nor temporal glory nor the brightness of light dear to earthly eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all kinds of songs, nor the gentle odor of flowers, and perfumes, nor manna or honey, nor limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh; it is not these I love when I love my God. Yet there is a light I love, and a food, and a kind of embrace when I love my God — a light, voice, odor, food, embrace of my innerness, where my soul is floodlit by light which space cannot contain, where there is sound that time cannot seize, where there is a perfume which no breeze disperses, where there is a taste for food no amount of eating can lessen, and where there is a bond of union that no satiety can part. That is what I love when I love my God.”

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

**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 sacraments that are the rings, are what publicly and powerfully convey the true 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 cov- enantal permanence.

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

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

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

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

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

**Office of Worship:** In order for a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic, permission first must be obtained from the bishop, via the vicar general. Then, a decision on whether or not to have a Nuptial Mass needs to be made in consultation with the pastor or priest involved in the planning process. It is sometimes the case that it would be better to highlight the unity of the couple rather than the differences. If the couple had a Mass, one person would not be able to receive the Holy Eucharist since he or she would not be Catholic (and it is also likely that most of the non-Catholic’s family would not be Catholic). Therefore, it might sometimes be sensible for the couple to have the Rite of Marriage outside of Mass.

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

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

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

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

**Office of Worship:** A lector at a Mass should be a person in full communion with the Catholic Church, a person who is serious about the practice of their faith, and a person who is willing to undergo appropriate preparation for the role. Proclaiming the Scriptures or reading the readings 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. However, if the Marriage rites are taking place outside Mass, then there would not be any problem with a baptized non-Catholic doing the readings.

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

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

**I need the whole morning to prepare for the wedding. Is there a special Mass for Marriage outside of church?**

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

**I am close to a pastor from my youth. Can we do for the Church to recognize this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions?**

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

**How does the new Mass translation affect weddings?**

**Office of Worship:** When the new Roman Missal was implemented in November of 2011, the texts of our Mass prayers were updated to be truer to the Latin original. Thus, they are richer, more eloquent, and often contain more theological nuance and beauty. We can hear this in the prayers of the wedding Mass, including the Nuptial Blessing. In addition, the new Missal more explicitly acknowledges the intrinsic fes- tive nature of a Marriage by prescribing that the penitential act be omitted and the Gloria always sung on those days in which the actual ritual Mass for Marriage can be used.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

**Who should be paid a salary? How is it determined?**

**Office of Worship:** It is a longstanding tradition of the Church to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacred rite (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has no pre- scribed fee, and there is no obligation for the amount. The priest or deacon may receive a fee that is given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

**Does the Church ever approve of artifical birth control methods?**

**Office of Family Life:** The Church believes that every act of sexual love must reflect the possibility of new life. This means that no one has the right to act as God designed. However, if fertilization has already occurred, a woman has been raped, and there is the possibility of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg, the Church approves of artificial birth control methods. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

**Who should be paid a salary? How is it determined?**

**Office of Worship:** It is a longstanding tradition of the Church to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacred rite (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has no prescribed fee, and there is no obligation for the amount. The priest or deacon may receive a fee that is given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

**Does the Church ever approve of artifical birth control methods?**

**Office of Family Life:** The Church believes that every act of sexual love must reflect the possibility of new life. This means that no one has the right to act as God designed. However, if fertilization has already occurred, a woman has been raped, and there is the possibility of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg, the Church approves of artificial birth control methods. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

**Who should be paid a salary? How is it determined?**

**Office of Worship:** It is a longstanding tradition of the Church to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacred rite (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has no prescribed fee, and there is no obligation for the amount. The priest or deacon may receive a fee that is given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

**Does the Church ever approve of artifical birth control methods?**

**Office of Family Life:** The Church believes that every act of sexual love must reflect the possibility of new life. This means that no one has the right to act as God designed. However, if fertilization has already occurred, a woman has been raped, and there is the possibility of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg, the Church approves of artificial birth control methods. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

**Who should be paid a salary? How is it determined?**

**Office of Worship:** It is a longstanding tradition of the Church to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacred rite (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has no prescribed fee, and there is no obligation for the amount. The priest or deacon may receive a fee that is given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

**Does the Church ever approve of artifical birth control methods?**

**Office of Family Life:** The Church believes that every act of sexual love must reflect the possibility of new life. This means that no one has the right to act as God designed. However, if fertilization has already occurred, a woman has been raped, and there is the possibility of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg, the Church approves of artificial birth control methods. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.

**Who should be paid a salary? How is it determined?**

**Office of Worship:** It is a longstanding tradition of the Church to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacred rite (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has no prescribed fee, and there is no obligation for the amount. The priest or deacon may receive a fee that is given to him personally. Checks made out to the parish would go to the church.

**Does the Church ever approve of artifical birth control methods?**

**Office of Family Life:** The Church believes that every act of sexual love must reflect the possibility of new life. This means that no one has the right to act as God designed. However, if fertilization has already occurred, a woman has been raped, and there is the possibility of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg, the Church approves of artificial birth control methods. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community. It is not the practice in the Christian community.

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

**Office of Worship:** The norm is that Marriages should take place in the church is the house of God, and not in the Christian community. It is this diocese to grant outdoor exceptions.
Frequently asked questions

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.

Who should be paid a stipend and how is it determined?
Office of Worship: It is a longstanding tradition to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacrament (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has 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 common 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 is common 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. 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 it is being 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 ever approve of any method of family planning for married couples?
Office of Family Life: The Church approves of natural family planning (NFP), which teaches 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.diocese/wsb.org/diocesan-offices/family-life-office/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 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.

Oh promise me
A pastor’s reflections on marriage preparation
BY MARK WEBER

“Oh, promise me that you will take my hand,
The most unworthy in this lonely land,
And let me sit beside you in your eyes,
Seeing the vision of our paradise…”
— Lyrics of “Oh Promise Me,” by Clement Scott, 1887

Today’s Catholic interviews Father Bill Sullivan, pastor, St. John the Baptist, New Haven, about marriage preparation, weddings and the sacrament of Marriage.

Today’s Catholic: You have married and observed couples for more than 40 years. Considering the reality of sickness, death, unemployment, infertility and other unforeseen circumstances, do engaged couples have a realistic idea of what may lie ahead?

Father Sullivan: A lot depends on the experience they have had with their own parents. If it has been a solid family life even in the midst of tragedy, they have the strength from their parents to go forward. If there is brokenness there, if a divorce has occurred, which unfortunately has happened all too often, they do not have a fear, but a sense of “Dear God, please don’t let that happen to us.” They see enough among their friends who may have married maybe too quickly. They are quite “in love,” but there is more to love than physical attraction and the more time they have in the engagement period to know each other makes them much stronger.

Today’s Catholic: On your very first assignment as a parish priest, did you prepare couples for marriage right away? If not, when did you first do so?

Father Sullivan: I was stationed at St. Jude (Fort Wayne) with Msgr. (William) Lester and other priests and we took turns preparing couples, and I embraced the couples that I had a chance to work with.

Today’s Catholic: How did you do this? Did you follow a form? Did your pastor guide you?

Father Sullivan: There were guidelines we had from the diocesan archdiocese — the prenuptial investigation. Right now we have the pre-marriage inventory and the Focus Instrument. I always tell them, for the number one reasons, do you have a relationship with the Lord, as an individual, what are you bringing to your marriage? If you don’t have a relationship with the Church, what are you bringing to the marriage? If you have neither of those, what are you going to bring to your children? And that is the first thing I always talk about after the initial session we have together — setting the date, filling out forms and telling them things that will be down the road. I see it as so important... you’re getting married in the Church. This is a sacrament. This is a sign to the world of your relationship not only to each other but with God. How strong is that and what do you want that to be?

Today’s Catholic: That is the emphatic point of your marriage preparation then, right?

Father Sullivan: Over the years, concern has been expressed about the number of marriages that are breaking up, and so now you have couples going to homes of married couples for the preparation period that came through the Family Life Office. We also have the Engaged Encounter for many couples. I am aware of other brother priests that some couples who went to that Engaged Encounter realized, “we’re not ready for marriage,” or “you’re not the right person that I should be marrying.” I see that as a tremendous gift. Today, a couple goes to a diocesan day, a kind of a mini-retreat under the Family Life Office, they attend nature family planning workshops, and we get certificates from both that they have participated. I’m not sure how many couples go to the home of a married couple in preparation. Because of the busy schedules of people, couples find it more convenient to take that one Saturday for a diocesan mini-retreat than to schedule three visits to the home of a married couple.

Today’s Catholic: Have you ever discouraged a couple from entering marriage? If so, why?

Father Sullivan: I’ve wondered about some couples. And as it turned out, the hunch was true. The marriage did not last that long. We have a responsibility to witness the marriage. We have a responsibility to write down our observations and put that in the parish records and said, so that if something should happen. You know they have the right to marry but there is a little wisdom, I think, between relationships. And sometimes there are obvious problems that come out in scoring the Focus Instrument. Some of it comes out in just talking with them. I remember one couple in particular, asking the woman, when we were alone: “Why are you marrying him? Look what he has been doing.” It lasted about six months. It breaks my heart, because she deserved better.

Today’s Catholic: What is the Focus Instrument?

Father Sullivan: It looks over a number of different areas in their relationship with each other — communication, problem solving, extended family issues, finances, children, religion, and marriage covenant — those kinds of areas. There are statements they respond to with: “I agree,” “I disagree,” or “I am uncertain.” And we tell them to respond with the first thing that comes to your mind as (it) concerns your relationship with each other or with the Church.

Today’s Catholic: Do priests see weddings as a chore?

Father Sullivan: We have a responsibility to guide them. I like it when couples come and I (them) if they have particular questions. If they don’t start talking about all of the little odds and ends of the marriage, that tells me they are serious about what they are about to do. The day is not the periphery. The day is the sacrament.

Today’s Catholic: How often do you see a couple for marriage preparation?

Father Sullivan: Right now the first session is getting to know them. They fill out forms about the prenuptial investigation. I share with them information about affidavits and baptismal certificates. I give them the Focus Instrument that they are to complete and return and then score. Then I meet with them two or three times.

If it is a couple where one is not of the Catholic faith, I have a time with them to answer any questions that person may have about the Church. Because my encouragement is pray together as often as possible on Sunday or Saturday night. If he belongs to another church, obviously, he’s going to go there, but the more often they can get together, they stronger they become.

I spend two or three times going over the Focus Instrument. The first one is on the spiritual life and their relationship with the Church... because some of them have been away from the Church. What happened? How may we help you? Come home. I’m glad you’re home. This is where you want to be.

The second one is regarding children. I always say, “You know you’re going to stand beside Lord and say, ‘In good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, I will love you and honor you all the days of my life’ and ask if they are open to the gift of children.” I always give them homework and I always say, “a little birdie told me last night that you’re going to be blessed with eight children. Tell me what you think about the little birdie.” Sometimes they gasp. And on occasion, I’ll get someone who will say, “Is that all?” And I find out how much they’ve talked about children and we go into natural family planning, and there is much more in the family planning workshop they go to. There is a sacramental holiness to life. That’s what I look at. Then we go over to the church and we talk about the wedding. When the rehearsal comes, I tell them the rehearsal will be on Saturday night. If he belongs to another church, obviously, he’s going to go there, but... if you have somewhere else to be, they will be on time.

Today’s Catholic: Can you remember the first couple you married? Were you nervous?

Father Sullivan: I can’t, but just yesterday morning, a couple came to the church here and said, “You witnessed our marriage 40 years ago.” They were from another parish and they knew that I had been the pastor. I was so happy to welcome him back to town.

Today’s Catholic: If you had the opportunity to change or modify requirements for marriage in the Catholic faith, would you do so? What would you change?

Father Sullivan: That’s a tough one. My first response is that my heart goes out to those who are married and divorced and long to come back and are in a second marriage. I know that in the Church we always uphold the sacredness of the bond, but to see people in church who can’t go to Communion, that kills me.

One of the issues we have now in our culture is cohabitation, and to address that issue is very sensitive. When I encounter that, I say to them, “Could you separate?” Much of the time they say “yes.” Often the reason they got together in the first place was to save money. There’s more to life and love than money. I’ve had couples come back and say, “Thank you. We’ve learned a lot about each other when we were not together.”

Sacred Heart Parish Center
On Notre Dame Campus
131 Bed Faculty complete with chapel and kitchen
• Retreats • Banquets
• Anniversaries • Reunions
• Graduations
• Family Gatherings
• Alumni Parties

Jacobson Photography
Weddings, Senior Portraits, Family portraits and Special Events
www.jacobsonphotographyinc.com
Bradley Jacobson
Colleen Jacobson
5118 Starwood Dr
Fort Wayne, IN 46835
260-486-5308
bradleymjacobson@mac.com

(574) 631-7512 • (574) 631-9430
S are made for each and meant to be of this truth that man and woman, Paul II found in the familiar story that makes us like God. Pope John profoundly by living in loving — we image God more perfectly the rational mind and free will we resemble God not only because of an individual but rather, a loving communion that we call the Holy Trinity. In this communion of persons, God the Father is the lover, God the Son is the beloved, and the love between them is so perfect, so real, that it is actually another person — the Holy Spirit. If we are created in the image and likeness of God, who is not an individual but rather, a loving communion of persons, then we resemble God not only because of the rational mind and free will we have as individual men and women — we image God more perfectly and profoundly by living in loving communion with one another. God created marriage to be the first, and in a sense, the most fundamental form of living out the personal, loving communion that makes us like God. Pope John Paul II found in the familiar story of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman; an ancient transcript of this truth that man and woman are made for each and meant to be a gift for each other. This call to communion is “written” in a special way into human sexuality, into the very maleness and femaleness of the human body, which are literally designed to fit together, making a man and woman capable of becoming “one flesh.” As Blessed John Paul II put it: “Sexuality is an enlargement of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love.” — “Familiaris consortio,” 37.

Sexual intercourse 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. In sexual union, a husband and wife say with their bodies in a very private way what they say publicly at the altar on their wedding day: “I accept you completely as the gift from God that you are, and I give myself to you completely in return.” Sex is also the body language of married love. This mutual gift of self, which is expressed in sexual union, is not meant to end with the couple, but rather, makes them capable of the greatest possible gift; becoming co-creators with God in giving life to a new human person. The communion of love between a husband and wife is meant to mirror the love that exists between the Father and the Son, a love that is literally “personified” in the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, through the privilege of procreation, God enables the love between a husband and wife to become “personified” in the gift of their child, who is literally the “second” of them in one flesh, a living reflection of their love and a permanent sign of their unity. And what is more, this new human being bears not only the image and likeness of his or her parents, but above all, the image and likeness of God. So we see that the love-giving and life-giving meanings of sexual union are intimately linked, like two sides of the same coin, because they mirror the inner life of God who is love. This beautiful vision is both a basis of all of the moral norms, which surround the gift of sexuality, including the norm that requires that every act of sexual love in marriage remain open to the transmission of life. Because God has inscribed in sexual intercourse an inseparable connection between its love-giving capacity and its life-giving capacity, married couples must respect the integrity of this act whenever they choose to engage in it. How, precisely, are contraception and sterilization irreligious with this concept of the human person and human sexuality? In essence, contraception and sterilization contradict the meaning of sex as an expression of total self-giving. If I withhold my fertility from my spouse, which is an integral part of my identity as a man or woman, I am not giving myself totally in the very act which is supposed to express most profoundly my complete gift of self. Here is how Pope John Paul II explained it: “When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings (love-giving and life-giving) that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as ‘arbiters’ of the divine plan and they ‘manipulate’ and degrade human love, which is a gift and with itself and their married partner — by altering its value of ‘total’ self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total, reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the integrity of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality.”

The Catholic Church promotes natural family planning (NFP) because it completely corresponds with God’s design for human sexuality, respecting the “body language” of married love and the inseparable link between its love-giving and life-giving purposes. NFP is a scientifically based method of regulating conception based on the innate language that expresses the total, reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife, and it enables couples to prayfully and faithfully respond to God’s call to be the most intimate sign of the mutual gift of self that a man and woman make to one another. The Church teaches that married couples who use NFP have a greater capacity to achieve or avoid a pregnancy, whether or not God is calling them to conceive a child and then to identify the days on which conception is possible should they desire to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. International studies confirm that when spouses are properly instructed and follow the rules carefully, NFP can have an effectiveness rate of 98-99 percent. Couples are also taught how the practice of exclusive, extended breast-feeding provides a significant period of infertility after the birth of a child. This kind of breast-feeding is, in fact, the most basic form of NFP because it can have the effect of naturally spacing the births of children over the course of a woman’s childbearing years. Many couples find that the mutual respect, regular communication and shared responsibility that the practice of NFP requires strengthens their relationship with one other. Most importantly, couples who use NFP have the assurance that they are acting as faithful stewards of God’s gifts of sexuality and fertility.
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 current address and date of birth is required.
- Some counties may require a certified copy of a birth certificate if applicant is under 30.
- The cost is $18 for in-state residents and $60 for out-of-state residents. IMPORTANT: Credit and debit 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 statewide.
- 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.

The website [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org) can aid couples located on the Internet at www.foryourmarriage.org, can aid couples of all faiths. The website, which is designed to promote healthy marriages. The website is designed for a wide and varied audience and is part of larger campaign, which includes television public service messages, the Internet to be a medium for evangelization and education.

The For Your Marriage website includes resources for everyone, including engaged and married couples, and facts about Catholic marriage. The website is designed for a wide and varied audience and is part of larger campaign, which includes television public service messages, which can be viewed on the site. The site offers daily marriage tips to statistics on marriages. The website, which is part of a multiyear National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage. The website and the entire campaign promote the simple exhortation to make your reception an event memorable for a lifetime.

Washington, D.C. — Putting a modern image on traditional values, the U.S. Catholic bishops launched a website designed to promote healthy marriages. The website, which is located on the Internet at www.foryourmarriage.org, can aid couples of all faiths. With everything from daily marriage tips to statistics on divorce and cohabitation, this site is an up-to-date resource.

The For Your Marriage website includes resources for everyone, including engaged and married couples, and facts about Catholic marriage. The website is designed for a wide and varied audience and is part of larger campaign, which includes television public service messages, which can be viewed on the site. The site offers daily marriage tips that suggest simple ways to cultivate a healthy marriage. A link on the home page also gives couples a tool to find Catholic marriage information locally. A monthly marriage quiz can serve as a conversation starter on sensitive issues.

Information on conflict resolution, communication and financial concerns is posted throughout the website. Topics such as intimacy and parenting also are featured. Visitors also can view stories and advice from married couples.

“The Internet has become a crucial means for evangelizing, especially among younger people,” said Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, chairman of the bishops’ Marriage and Family Life Committee. “We hope youth especially will find inspiration and hope at the stroke of a key.”

The contemporary design of the For Your Marriage website has versatility and accessibility to enable the Internet to be a medium for evangelization and education.

The For Your Marriage website is part of a multiyear National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage. The website and the entire campaign promote the simple exhortation to do something for your marriage.

---

For more information about the website and its resources, visit www.foryourmarriage.org.
What is appropriate wedding attire for church?

BY LISA EVERETT

E
evry bride wants to look beautiful on her wedding day, and every
bridesmaid hopes to wear a dress that is both fashionable and flatter-
ing. 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 refus-
ing 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 pos-
sible 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.

Helping buyers and sellers find the home of their dreams!
Call me...I’m here to help.

Andrea “Andy” Hall
REALTOR® ABR, CRS, CDPE

8101 Coldwater Road
Fort Wayne, IN 46804
Call: (260) 417-5093
Fax: (260) 490-1591
andyhall@remax.net
www.ANYHALLHOMES.com

Hampton Inn Southwest
8219 W. Jefferson Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46804
(260) 432-0334

We’d love to have
Your guests be Our guests!

Inn at Saint Mary's
Hotel & Suites

Hampton Inn & Suites
8219 W. Jefferson Blvd.
Fort Wayne, IN 46804
260-432-0334

North Liberty Community Center
300 South Main, North Liberty, IN 574-656-4134

We’d love to have
Your guests be Our guests!

The Gillespie
Conference & Special Event Center
SOUTH BEND • 574-232-4000
www.gillespieconferencecenter.com
www.innatsaintmarys.com

Gillespie offers a 600
person Ballroom with
150 rooms connected
for all your guests!

A ballroom like no other, the Palais Royale is your ideal wedding reception venue. Historic charm. Modern elegance. A perfect combination of old and new await you.

Making fairy tales come true since 1922

574-235-5612  www.PalaisRoyale.org