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The Spirituality of Struggle Marriage and the Paschal Mystery

By Mike Allen, M. Div., D. Min.

I'm a Family Life director, not a marriage counselor, but because I sometimes write about the spirituality of marriage in our diocesan newspaper, some people view me that way. It sounds like a parody of a commercial: "Are you a trained counselor?" "No, but I did sleep in a Holiday Inn Express last night."

Mindful of my limits, then, I agreed to meet once or twice with a troubled young couple to hear their story and offer guidance toward a referral. At our initial meeting, the frustrated couple sat in my office, with each spouse lamenting a deep dissatisfaction with their marriage, talking about divorce with an air of inevitability.

As each spouse spoke, I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, the explosive revelation that might explain why two Catholics (and the parents of several young children) would willingly walk away from their lifelong covenant. What was the dark secret that doomed their marriage—Infidelity? Physical abuse? Addiction?

Apparently, there was no such se-

Mike Allen is the Director of Family Life Ministries for the Diocese of Lexington, Ky. See www.marriagefriendlytherapists.com for a partial list of counselors who support marriage.

cret. What I heard instead was a complaint from him that he didn't feel respected, and that he never felt supported in decisions he had made for their family. Meanwhile, her primary grievance was that she didn't feel listened to, and that he often made financial choices without consulting her first. Their bitterness was palpable.

After a brief silence, I said to them,

"I appreciate your honesty about your relationship. I can sense the hurt and frustration you are both experiencing. I want to be sensitive to your feelings, but part of me wants to say to you, 'Welcome to marriage.'"

"What I mean," I continued, "is that when God brought you together in marriage, you were called to grow in love. That's

what marriage is; your chosen school for learning to love – your vocation. And these difficulties you are facing in your marriage – feeling disrespected or not listened to – are not really unusual, but are, in fact, to be expected."

I know, I know; I just revealed why I'm not qualified to be a marriage counselor, imposing my own value system on that poor couple. My mea culpa is that I just can't help myself. It's amazing to me how many Christian couples are surprised that marriage is,

well, hard.

Perhaps their naiveté makes sense. One of the problems in the Church, after all, is that we tend to present our best faces to each other because we think an authentic Christian is always happy and confident, with no worries or doubts. Naturally, then, we present the same picture of Christian marriage. Thus, when couples face problems, as virtually all couples do, they have the mistaken notion that our marriage is the only one struggling.

And yet, the demands of marriage are intrinsic to its nature. Think about it. Two individual persons called into intimate union, both with their own backgrounds, their own wills, their own personalities, their own preferences, and their own passions. How can such a vocation not bring with it immense challenge? And yet it is these very difficulties that best serve to shape our character and teach us to love.

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Welcome to marriage... These difficulties you are facing are not really that unusual, but are in fact to be expected.

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FROM THE EDITOR



“And they lived happily ever after” – Not!

Sure. Even happily married couples know it's not that easy. In fact, some of the happiest couples have achieved that satisfaction through trial and error and the school of hard knocks. As family life ministers we try mightily to work on the front end of marriage - the preventive end. This includes not only our well developed and mandatory marriage preparation programs, but also the numerous marriage enrichment programs we offer. Unfortunately, we all know that many couples don't take advantage of prevention, just as we might skip flossing or a six month dental check-up. We don't go because we're not hurting - yet.

And so it is with hurting marriages. Of course much pain could have been prevented on the front end, but our job is to minister to couples wherever they are in the marriage life cycle. This Journal issue provides numerous ideas for assisting couples in troubled marriages. Some will be very familiar to you, like *The Third Option* and *Retrouvaille*. Others might pique your curiosity. Our experienced members offer some additional tips worth incorporating in your repertoire. ■

Susan Vogt

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As Catholics, we hear often about redemptive suffering, the belief that the trials we endure are never wasted but allow us to participate intimately in the passion of Christ. Rarely, however, do we translate that idea to marriage. And yet, the context of marriage - with its sometimes petty squabbles, power plays, and unreasonable expectations - provides the most proximate opportunity that spouses have to embody the suffering that true love requires, the self-gift that calls us to lay down our lives, minute by minute, for the good of the beloved, whether that love is reciprocated or not.

In that sense, the term “struggling marriage” is redundant. For while some marital challenges may be more strenuous than others, we do a disservice in marriage ministry when we fail to communicate that learning to love can be a painful process. After all, if the cross is the quintessential expression of love, how can we think that learning to love won't hurt?

The good news, of course, is the hope of the Paschal Mystery. It is in sharing Christ's suffering that we pass over with him from death to life. Thus, rather than fear marital struggles, couples should embrace them; not because trials are pleasant, but because apart from the struggle, love will never mature. There can be no Easter without Good Friday.

I don't know what will happen with the couple who sat in my office, but I do know this; their marriage can die on its own, or it can die with Jesus. If it dies on its own, it's just dead. But if they move forward together, seeking to lay themselves down in mutual submission, their struggling marriage will bear fruit in new life and deeper love. As the Catechism declares, “It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to “receive” the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life” (1615). ■

How to Make a Counseling Referral

by **Anthony J. Garascia, M.A., M.S., LCSW**

Couples who are experiencing difficulties in their marriage often look to the church for help. Although most pastoral ministers are not professional marriage counselors, you may be the first person to whom a couple turns. Problems emerge in any loving relationship. Most of the time a couple takes these problems in stride. When a couple faces a problem beyond their ability to solve, however, as a helping professional you are in a unique position to make a referral to a competent marriage counselor. When a couple approaches you with questions about their marriage, they want someone who will look at both sides and serve as a mediator, coach, therapist, and offer genuine and concrete suggestions. Of course, in asking for a referral, a couple places an enormous trust in your recommendations.

MAINTAIN A LIST OF QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

Most states have some form of licensure for counselors. This means that counselors must have a degree that meets certain standards on theory, practice, and ethics. Counselors should be licensed in their particular state and have a Ph.D. or Masters degree in counseling or clinical psychology, or a Masters in Social Work from an accredited university. Here are some criteria to consider when making your list.

- **Experience.** Couples want to know that the person they see has “been around the block” and will be comfortable talking about issues like finances, conflict, communication, sex, and just about any other issue that gets raised in the course of a marriage.
- **Skill.** When someone approaches a counselor they assume that he/she has

the skill necessary to help them solve their problems. The best way to find the most skilled therapists is to listen to the evaluations from people you have referred in the past. Don’t be afraid to ask a couple to let you know how the experience went. This will assist you in refining your own list of counselors.

- **Areas of expertise.** Some therapists are great at communication and conflict, others are more helpful at dealing with anger; some won’t deal with issues like domestic violence, others will. Some counselors are great at dealing with adolescents.

When a couple approaches you for a referral, it is best to know a little about the problem so you know who on your referral list can best help them solve the problem.

- **Faith and Spirituality.**

A therapist who is “pro-marriage” will do everything possible to keep a marriage intact while at the same time recognizing that marriages do indeed fail. Many couples today want someone who views spirituality as an important part of the overall process of being successfully married.

HELP COUPLES FIND A GOOD FIT

Once you have developed a referral list of qualified counselors, you may assist the couple in discerning a “good fit” for this particular couple. For example,

- **Consider age and life experience.** If the couple seeking counseling has children or is middle aged, they may not have confidence in a counselor who is young and single.

- **Consider counselor gender.** Although a good counselor should be free of gender bias, the client may not always be. Check out if either spouse would feel uncomfortable with a counselor of the same or opposite gender.

- **Match the couple’s presenting problem** with the expertise of the counselor when possible.

- **How important is faith?** For many couples seeking a referral from a religious source, faith is important to them and having a counselor who can draw on faith and spirituality as a resource can be helpful. On the other hand, some couples would not be receptive to a heavy handed faith approach.

- **Consider practicalities** such as cost, location, and urgency of appointment. For those who don’t have insurance that covers counseling, marriage counseling can range from \$50-

150 per hour. Short term counseling often takes the form of weekly sessions for three to six months. Some social agencies and churches offer a sliding scale adjusted according to the couple’s income. Fees may also vary according to the cost of living in your geographic area. It may be helpful to have sources available that can help with co-pays or financial assistance, especially when insurance is not available.

- **Always offer more than one name** as a referral.

PREPARE COUPLES TO MAKE THE MOST OF COUNSELING

Many marriage counselors will take a short term, problem solving approach to marriage counseling. This means that a couple will be in counseling anywhere between 6 to 12 sessions. Knowing this information can also help a couple estimate how costly the counseling process will be to them. Some tips to pass on to couples seeking counseling for the first time are:

- Before the first session, spouses should ask themselves, “What is the end goal of counseling for me?” Encourage couples to be as specific as possible. In order for both to trust the counselor,

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A couple places an enormous trust in a pastoral minister’s recommendations.

Tony Garascia is Clinical Director, Samaritan Counseling Center, South Bend, Indiana. Adapted from “When to Seek Counseling” www.foryourmarriage.org.

both spouses should give themselves permission to ask questions.

- The counselor is there to listen to their story and will ask questions that assist in the listening process. At the end of the first session the counselor may give suggestions or homework for the next session. It is important that a couple gives the process some time to work. A couple should be realistic about instant results and be prepared to give the process some time.

- A client usually knows counseling is working when the original problem is solved or at least significantly improved. At that point the therapist may ask if there are other issues to be solved or whether the counseling process is finished. Often, a couple will move on to other significant issues.

- The most effective counseling is done when a couple fully participates by saying what they both want to see happen. The counselor guides them to solve their problem and improve their relationship satisfaction.

WHEN MORE THAN MARRIAGE COUNSELING IS NEEDED

Sometimes a spouse confides that there are deeply serious problems present. Perhaps there is drinking, substance abuse, or domestic violence.

Here, it is important to have not only counselors who specialize in these areas but also a list of resources that offer a safe place for a spouse and children when violence is occurring; agencies that offer anger management courses, or treatment programs for substance and alcohol abuse. Your role as a Family Life minister is to help sort through the options. This can often be a moment of grace for someone who is anxious about his/her future.

In addition to counselors in private practice, several national counseling agencies that, when desired, take one's faith into consideration are:

Diocesan Catholic Charities provides counseling to people of any faith and usually have a sliding scale according to income.

Samaritan Centers provide cost-efficient counseling emphasizing the interrelatedness of mind, body, spirit, and community. ■

Help Outside the Box Beyond the Counselor's Office

Although referring to a marriage counselor is the most common response for family ministers and others in the helping professions, there are several other options that can be used in addition to, and sometimes as a substitute for, traditional counseling. Some couples are hesitant to seek counseling. It may be that they don't think the problem is that bad. They may have fears about revealing their private struggles and weaknesses. They may be afraid of the cost, or counseling resources may simply not be available nearby. Whatever the reason, it is helpful to have some alternative resources to suggest to couples facing challenges in their marriage.

Family Perspectives reminds ministers of the two most commonly used programs for troubled marriages (*Retrouvaille* and *The Third Option*) and introduces the alternative approach of using phone counseling and phone coaching).

RETROUVAILLE

In one of our favorite movies, *The Princess Bride*, a kiss between two of the characters is described as being one of the five greatest in recorded history. Our first kiss was one of the other four. My courtship, engagement and early marriage to Frank were no less passionate.

Soon we were knee deep in childcare, housework and at least two jobs each. I don't remember exactly where the line blurred between wedded bliss and disillusionment, but now instead of being passionate about my husband, I was only passionate in my attempts to win an argument or put Frank in his place.

It didn't take long for frustration to lead to bitterness, distance, and finally infidelity. After three years of trying to piece together our shattered relationship, I was done trying. Nothing could fix this. I filed for divorce.

Then I was given an article about

Retrouvaille. Just five weeks shy of our final divorce hearing, we attended the *Retrouvaille* program. I went skeptically, planning to check *Retrouvaille* off my list, just like my notion of checking Frank off my list of things I was supposed to be responsible for. I was not prepared for the grace and power of our *Retrouvaille* weekend. That was ten years and two more daughters ago. *Retrouvaille* saved our marriage.

Retrouvaille is for couples in *all* stages of marriage, both chronologically and emotionally. It pains me when couples believe they are "not *that* bad" and choose not to attend or claim, "We're too far gone." *Retrouvaille* can help. *Retrouvaille* is a peer ministry for hurting marriages. One of the greatest draws of *Retrouvaille* is that it is a safe place for healing. Attending couples are not asked to share their pain with the team or group. *Retrouvaille* begins with an residential weekend where a priest and three team couples share their stories of misery and ultimately reconciliation. Attendees are given questions to ponder as they share their thoughts and feelings with their spouse in the privacy of their own room.

Retrouvaille continues with a three-month Post Program. During the Posts, major topics of the weekend are explored more thoroughly, e.g. Personality Styles, Family of Origin, Sex, Trust, and Forgiveness.

Our marriage has endured unbearable pain and hopelessness. Now, thanks to God and *Retrouvaille*, we offer our story of pain as a gift to others.

There are 140 *Retrouvaille* communities in 24 countries worldwide. The U.S. has 105 *Retrouvaille* communities in 38 states.

Frank and Julie LaBoda serve on the Retrouvaille International Coordinating team with Fr. Walt Bracken, SVD.
www.HelpOurMarriage.com

Help Outside the Box

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THE THIRD OPTION

The Third Option marriage program was founded at Family Life, Diocese of Syracuse, in 1988 to address the needs of struggling marriages. The vision was to offer *on-going* support so couples could receive immediate help. Participants can join at any time, stay as long as they need, and a spouse may come alone.

The program has three components: 1) Fourteen skill-building workshops (which continually recycle), 2) witnessing by mentor couples who have overcome serious problems, and 3) a support group where couples share their struggles. While there is a set agenda, the atmosphere is relaxed, safe, and non-judgmental, and no one is pressured to speak. Walk-ins are welcome and an orientation is available at each session. Workshops employ skits, games and slogans to highlight the points, and the program teaches a unique method which couples can apply to all aspects of their marriage.

Since hurting couples are often in denial, and since *The Third Option* also works well as marriage enrichment, it is advertised as, "to build better marriages." This helps catch hurting couples early and gives others the opportunity for preventive education. It is wonderful to see couples who were once hurting, start holding hands and smiling.

Because *The Third Option* is a manual-based program, no special training is required to implement it. Step-by-step instructions explain how to get started and scripts are given for the workshops. Some churches use the (optional) videos rather than present live workshops in the beginning. Groups cannot charge a fee, but a free-will offering usually covers costs. A group can be started in approximately four months with about four (volunteer) mentor couples. Normally, a large parish, deanery or family life office sponsors the program, opening it to the larger community. While *The*

Third Option is an educational and skills program, rather than a theological one, the new Catholic Edition provides a uniquely Catholic perspective. *The Third Option* has the endorsement of several bishops and is recipient of a 2005 Smart Marriages Impact Award.

The Good News Foundation in Utica, New York, offers both *The Third Option* and *Retrouvaille* and their staff has discovered that the two programs dovetail nicely. Couples can join *The Third Option* any time, gaining support and valuable skills; then, if they wish, they can attend a *Retrouvaille* weekend when it is offered, for a deeper experience of healing.

Patricia Crane Ennis, LMSW, Director of www.TheThirdOption.com, Syracuse, NY.

TELE-COUNSELING

Telephone counseling. "Does that really work?" As founder and director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute, an organization that provides about 8300 hours of telephone counseling annually to Catholics around the world, it's a question I hear a lot. And the answer is an unequivocal, "Yes."

Although many clients are initially concerned with the lack of face-to-face contact with their counselor, almost all of our clients quickly come to prefer tele-counseling because it enables them to achieve a deeper level of disclosure more quickly than traditional counseling. This "confession behind the screen" dynamic is known as the "disinhibition effect."

Tele-counseling clients are often unable to take advantage of local counseling because of inadequate child care, difficult work schedules, or other practical concerns. More often, clients report being unable to find local counselors capable of helping them in a manner that is respectful of their faith.

Our therapists are licensed professionals with degrees in counseling and theology and are faithful to the Magisterium. We conduct our work in the

context of the Theology of the Body and each counselor has received additional training in the clinical implications of TOB. We apply the latest validated techniques and insights gained from counseling research in the context of the great spiritual and moral traditions of our Catholic faith. For complex cases, we have an advisory board of moral theologians, canon lawyers, Catholic physicians, and clergy on whom we rely for faithful advice.

Whether a Catholic is seeking help for personal, relational, spiritual, sexual, or psychological crisis, the Pastoral Solutions Institute is a ready resource for faithful solutions to life's most difficult problems.

Dr. Gregory Popcak is the founder of the Pastoral Solutions Institute, 740-266-6461, www.CatholicCounselors.com

PHONE COACHING

In addition to other supports for marriage, relationship coaching can be an effective tool. It is generally done by phone, which is convenient and time-efficient.

While some phone coaches may not have professional degrees in counseling, they encourage their clients to move forward and offer innovative life skills. Coaching is to counseling as a mega-vitamin is to an antibiotic.

Couples seek coaching support for issues ranging from boredom, to contempt, to discernment whether divorce is unavoidable. Sessions typically end with a review of new insights and a commitment to specific action steps.

Coaching fees, which are not generally covered by insurance, may be in the \$300-400 per month range, for three 45-minute sessions. A 3-6 month commitment is common.

If you think a couple might benefit from phone coaching, recommend a professionally trained coach with specific expertise in working with couples.

Trudy Costa is a relationship coach living in Arlington, Texas but coaching virtually at (817) 652-0041, coach@TrudyCosta.com.

Shattered Dreams

When All the Counseling in the World Doesn't Work

By Regina Staloch

Editor's Note: Family ministers exert great effort to support marriage and save couples from the pain of divorce. Regrettably, neither we, nor the couples we serve, are perfect and thus we are not always successful. Because of this, family ministers are also about supporting men and women who experience divorce. It is in this spirit that we offer an article on divorce ministry.

Since 1974, Catholic Divorce Ministry of the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics (CDM/NACSDC) has worked to create a network of support for families experiencing the trauma of the loss of the marital relationship by addressing the religious, emotional, and parenting issues. We strive to make Christ's abundant love known so all might experience compassion, spiritual and emotional recovery, healing, reconciliation and new life. Our primary vehicle for this is peer support groups with trained facilitators who themselves have experienced the pain and grief of divorce. The facilitators understand the consequences and ripple effects on families from the inside.

Losing your best friend creates a major life crisis. When a couple marries, neither is planning a divorce. In time, however, many marriages are on the rocks and sometimes only one partner is aware of the dissatisfaction. Communication skills are lacking when unhappiness is self contained. No one can read a mind. The attitude that "good Catholics don't get divorced" exists in parishes. Divorce is not always a mutually agreed upon decision. It takes two to marry but only one to file for a civil divorce. The whole family needs healing as the children's dreams are also broken.

Regina Staloch is president of Catholic Divorce Ministry and lives in Arnold, Mo.

The separation process, whether mutually agreed upon or not, creates a great struggle with the commitment "until death do us part." Can I require my partner to seek marriage counseling or talk with our pastor? No. Imagine the shock when a person learns a spouse can obtain a civil divorce by filing paperwork at the local court house stating irreconcilable differences, live apart for three months, and, if the wife is not pregnant, the sheriff will deliver divorce papers to be signed in court before a judge.

Retrouvaille and *The Third Option* are helpful to save marriages when both are willing participants. In fact, couples should make sure attending such a program is on their "required to do" list before finalizing a divorce. If divorce becomes unavoidable, however, and a person hopes to one day marry again, marriage enrichment and relationship skills training are just as important before entering into a serious new relationship.

Although painful, it is crucial that divorcing women and men walk through – not jump over – their divorce grief in order to obtain the life giving spirit meant for each of us. Some have found help by staying close to Jesus through Eucharistic Adoration, others get professional counseling and/or medication when necessary, still others begin and end each day with prayer while adding The Serenity Prayer hourly.

Taking off the wedding ring does not make one single again in society, in the Catholic Church, or in God's eyes. Civil divorce is the state's method to separate the marriage partnership

legally. This civil divorce does *not* exclude Catholics from receiving the sacraments. In 1977, Pope Paul VI rescinded the excommunication that had been in effect *if* a person remarried without first receiving an annulment.

In Catholic Church law, the couple is still married unless an ecclesiastical decree of nullity (an annulment) is granted by the Diocesan Tribunal. Completing the annulment questionnaire can be a healing experience when done with pastoral guidance. The questions go back to the wedding day to discover if full disclosure and consent

had been available to each person making the covenant with each other before God and a priest or deacon. The questions surface unresolved hurts stuffed deep within the heart. Uncontrollable tears may flow again as Jesus journeys with us to share our burden and show us the way through shattered dreams.

Can I require my partner to seek marriage counseling or talk with our pastor?

Even if divorced people never plan to re-marry, CDM strongly encourages divorced Catholics to seek an annulment to feel God's mercy, healing grace, peace, joy, forgiveness and closure. It's necessary to drop the baggage from the previous marriage in order not to repeat past mistakes. Nobody wants a second marriage to fail due to incomplete homework.

CDM dedicates itself to serve as a major resource to dioceses and parish leaders for publications and facilitator training. NACFLM members are welcome to join CDM to support this vital ministry of healing. To become a member and to review resources see www.nacsd.org. Every human relationship is an eternal responsibility. ■

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS



William F. Urbine, D.Min.
Director, Office of Family Life Ministries
Diocese of Allentown

Farewell

This is my last “President’s column.” I am pleased to announce the obvious. NACFLM is alive and doing quite well. Our national conference has demonstrated this compellingly. Our volunteer leadership (NACFLM’s Board and many commission members) is outrageously enthusiastic that our future bodes well. Their incredible commitment to serving our membership is *awesome*. I choose not to focus on the past four years but to look ahead.

On a global level—the “swine flu” (aka *H1N1*) has recently been declared a pandemic. Nationally, the unemployment rate is moving toward 10%. A few states have moved from advocating “same sex unions” to ratifying legally “same sex marriages.” Divorce is still going strong and cohabitation is increasing. Parishes are closing. Money is tight. More and more diocesan family life offices are closing.

Is the sky really falling? Not really – just more opportunities and challenges to bring the Gospel message to all. We have more opportunities to evangelize. We have even more occasions to bring the Gospel of Love and Life to our world.

Doesn’t it feel great to be a radical? After all, what we proclaim, and what NACFLM believes in, is a radically countercultural vision of marriage and family. We believe strongly that God calls us to sacramental marriage – a man and a woman, creating a household of faith and nurturing that household into a full domestic church.

Now if that isn’t countercultural, I don’t know what is.

Yes, for those of us in the “business” of family ministries for awhile (I start 36 years in August) it can be wearying. As a licensed marriage and family therapist, it is tiresome at times to hear people talk about their Internet/cell phone affairs, unruly kids saturated with text messaging and twittering technology, even while they can’t figure out how to talk with each other. Behind our strength based enrichment programs we have many opportunities to hold out a vision of life in the fullness of the Trinity – an intimate communion between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Where is this going? As my spiritual director would say, “Step back and pray more often.” Ask God for guidance and direction in this ministry to marriage and families. Move away from your plans and find out what God wants. If you’re already doing this well, then accolades! If not, consider more time on your knees. By the way, I can say all this because I am the founder and charter member of Hypocrites Anonymous (aka HA!). I fail miserably at this, and know that I need to do this even more. There is no wisdom here, rather common sense that any disciple of Christ would suggest to you and me.

To our new members – welcome aboard! Roll up your sleeves and join us in the adventure of proclaiming our radical message. It is in giving, we receive.

As modest as it has been, it has been a joy to be of service to NACFLM over the last few years. Peace and blessings. You pray for my family, and I’ll pray for yours. ■

One Parish’s Use of *Fireproof*

Fireproof is a powerful and inspiring movie about a struggling marriage. This movie is particularly relevant to young couples because it includes real marital issues. In the Fall of 2009 we will be running a three part series that uses *Fireproof* as our kickoff session.

Nicky Aiello is Steward of Family Life at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Kalamazoo, Mich.

The second session will use a speaker from *Desert Streams*. The third session will be a dinner for couples with a licensed clinical social worker on hand to answer any questions. This also helps people to be aware of the services of such parish staff. We will continue to work to provide date nights for couples in need of a night away by providing childcare and a meal. ■

MEMBERS SPEAK: HELPING TROUBLED MARRIAGES

What have you been able to do or say in ministry that was helpful to someone in a troubled marriage?

Have you observed anything that friends or family have done that was helpful?

I tell men, “**Put yourself on the shelf.**” Instead, focus on what is upsetting your wife. Hear her complaint as a request. One man said his wife complained that he was never around enough, and that this made him feel pressured and angry. When I asked him to turn it into a request he realized she wanted him around more often. “Why would she want you around more?” I chided. He smiled and said, “Because she loves me.” “And how does this make you feel?” He was now grinning and said simply, “Great.” After some coaching to take on the discipline of seeing her complaints as requests, this man was able to turn their marriage around.

I also teach couples to get out of the **blaming/victim/helpless** position by no longer assigning the responsibility for their upsetness to their spouse. No longer say, “You make me feel ...” but instead say, “When you do x, I feel y.” Couples can become addicted to being right! They then spend an inordinate amount of time **making each other wrong.** They need to give up debating who is right. Humor and play go a long way in helping one give up their drama – their perceptions about what happened. Chances are that your partner has a different perception about what happened.

What can sound really strange is to tell couples that **they are too close,** emotionally speaking, and that they need to separate from this “stuck-togetherness” in order not to SEPARATE. Teach couples to use the **IMAGO** dialogue technique in which they learn a new way of relating and a spiritual pathway to wholeness and holiness.

*Don Paglia
Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn.*

I have observed three things that have helped various couples over time.

1. Go to *Retrouville* even if you think your marriage has no future. You will meet others in the same boat and learn from them how to rebuild your marriage. The challenge is worth it.

2. Divorce rarely solves the problems you are having. If there are children in the marriage, you are forever linked to your partner because of the children. You owe them the chance to grow up with parents who love them and can all live under one roof. Read the book *Mom's House, Dad's House* by Isolini Ricci, and get a taste of what your children will go through if you divorce. Rethink what you are contemplating.

3. If you separate without a plan, you are almost assured of divorce.

If you have a plan, you may get clarity on your problems and be able to work them out. If you cannot work them out, at least you will understand why a divorce is necessary and you will have developed a parenting plan that reduces trauma to the children you both love.

Controlled Separation® is a good plan to study and apply.

I also listen closely for situations where domestic abuse is present and where addictions are present. These marriages require a different life boat.

*Elsie Radtke
Associate Director, Family Ministries
Archdiocese of Chicago*

We offer *The Third Option* program, which provides a means to learn skills and receive encouragement and support from team couples who believe and model that working through issues surfaced in marriage is possible with the help of grace. Knowing there needs to be varied opportunities for marriage

education and spiritual growth, a communication/conflict resolution workshop was developed and offered at no charge to engaged and married couples. Early in its launch, a wife called requesting help; she and her husband were now married 18 months and fighting with no resolution. In fact, they lived in separate rooms. I invited them to the communication/conflict resolution workshop to be held the next day. She told me that she would ask her husband to attend. He came with body language radiating irritation. When the workshop concluded, he said, “I wish I had known these techniques and information before; I am now going to seek counseling to better my marriage.”

*Louise Ritz
Director, Marriage and Family Life
Diocese of Pensacola, Fla.*

1. The “Ouch” rule: Couples in troubled relationships often hurt each other unintentionally because they are overly sensitive due to accumulated emotional injuries. When your spouse does or says something that hurts, immediately say ‘ouch – that hurt!’ It gives your spouse the opportunity to rephrase or clarify what they meant.

2. The “Connect Hug:” Create a more affectionate atmosphere between you. When you are testy with each other, ask for a “Connect Hug.” Wherever you are, stop and hug each other. Breathe deeply and let your anger go. Hold on for at least a minute or for as long as it takes to feel a connection. Do this several times a day.

3. Pray for Passion: Passion is a desire to give yourself in love and service to your spouse. Spend five minutes each day to do the following:

MEMBERS SPEAK

TRoubLED MARRIAGES

1. Rate your passion (scale of 1-10).
 2. Ask yourself: "What's holding me back from having more passion?" (e.g. fear of rejection, laziness, despondency, anger, etc.)
 3. Pray for the Lord to lift your barriers.
- Francine & Byron Pirola*
authors of *Celebrate Love and Embrace*
www.thepmrc.org

A recent situation involved a newly married couple and pornography. We were able to refer for counseling and also recommend the websites: www.myhouse.archkck.org, www.foryourmarriage.org, and www.catholictherapists.com. That then led to our creating a postcard size quick reference to give to our priests. Also, the *Fireproof* movie has ministered to many couples. We received reports of marriages being saved.

Judith Leonard
Director, Office of Family Life and NFP
Diocese of Wichita, Kan.

First, encourage them to talk about what the problem is. Serve as a facilitator to manage their communication. Listen to their feelings, one at a time. One should be listening while the other one talks. Talk about one situation at a time. Guide them to make an action plan that will bring peace to both. Offer the couple resources: books, workshops, marriage ministry.

Dn. Felix Montañez & Digna Montañez,
Family Life Manager Diocese of Orlando,
Renovacion Conyugal Ministry

A couple who had experienced infidelity found it helpful to write ideas for positive actions on slips of paper and keep them in a box. This helped them focus on something other than their pain and hurt. They thought of this box as a way to give God the good of their relationship. They wrote ideas like: dinner with each other, walks, prayer, creating a Mary garden, playing board games, or going to movies. They pulled out a slip when they were able to inten-

MINISTER SPOTLIGHT

Patricia Crane Ennis



■ **Title:** Director of *The Third Option*

■ **What do you actually do?** I facilitate *The Third Option* marriage program every other Sunday night in Syracuse, New York. Nationally, I support *The Third Option* groups through consultation, conferences, trainings, and resource creation. Our newest resource is *Third Option Catholic Edition*.

■ **How long have you been in family ministry?** Since 1987. Until last January I also coordinated Separated/Divorced Ministry and Parenting Ministry for the Diocese of Syracuse.

■ **My own family:** Bryan, my husband of 40 years, three grown daughters and their families including grandchildren, 1 granddog, 5 grandcats, and 2 grandgerbils.

■ **Best part of my job:** Getting to watch hurting couples who arrive at our group scowling, start to smile and hold hands.

■ **Most challenging job:** Knowing that many more marriages could be saved if we only had more "workers in the vineyard."

■ **Trends I've noticed in family ministry:**

1. The incredible explosion of marriage research, education, and skills programs
2. The USCCB's National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage

■ **Resources I find most helpful to my ministry:**

1. *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman
2. *The Assertive Christian* by Alberti and Emmons
3. *Getting the Love You Want* by Harville Hendricks

■ **My ministry would be easier if:** (as I suspect with most of us) if I had more time.

tionally draw upon the grace of the sacrament of marriage. They also had a second box for those times when they felt pulled away from the grace of the sacrament of marriage. This box was a way to give to God what they didn't feel able to handle and helped them say, "God, we truly don't know what to do, please strengthen us through the sacrament of matrimony." They would then open the box when they especially needed His help - when either of them was pulled into despair, tears, a loud voice, or angry words. Stopping to retrieve the box before acting called them both to greater awareness and responsibility to recognize God's part. This idea was helpful after the initial time of shock and anger had subsided

and they both agreed that they wanted to work toward reconciliation.

Valerie Conzett, LPC,
Diocese of Omaha, Neb.

Through my Ministry of Consolation, I have discovered that a formidable area of need within a troubled marriage is the healthy communication of feelings between husbands and wives. Whether because of lack of respect, lack of verbal skills, narcissism or insensitivity, couples often set up a pitched battle which slowly erodes the marriage. I also heartily endorse *Retrouvaille*, an invaluable aid to stronger marriages!

Ms. Marilyn Schipp
Consolation Ministries
Diocese of Trenton, N.J.

RESOURCES



Ministering to Troubled Marriages

William F. Urbine, D.Min.
 Director, Office of Family Life Ministries
 Diocese of Allentown

It is a challenging time in many couple's lives – Internet affairs, poor communication, challenging stepfamily relationships, infidelity, addictions, and LSD (low sexual desire). What can we offer to assist?

Two volumes offered by Ascension Press offer hope and healing **Amazing Grace for Marriages** (2005) and **Amazing Grace for Families** (2008) offer stories of enrichment and optimism. They highlight facets of marriage and family life that touch upon real life experience. www.AscensionPress.com.

Shattered Dreams: Healing After Divorce is a 30-minute DVD addressing themes of rejection, grief, intimacy, forgiveness, and letting go. Paraclete Press, 2004. www.paracletepress.com.

Are you sliding or deciding? In **Dr. Scott Stanley's blog** on commitment and relationships, he writes, "The core idea is that people often are *sliding* through important transitions in relationships – or moments in life – rather than *deciding*. Commitments that enrich our lives, that we are most likely to follow through on, are based in decisions." The blog is engaging and offers some insightful ideas on promoting commitment in relationships. <http://slidingvsdeciding.blogspot.com>.

Dr. Sue Johnson, developer of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy gives us **Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love** This well-respected theorist and clinician advocates for an emotional reconnection between couples through seven transforming discussions needed in a relationship. Little, Brown and Company, 2008. www.HachetteBookGroupUSA.com

Loss and grief are always hard concerns in marriages. **Grieving With Mary: Finding Comfort and Healing in Devotion to the Mother of God.** Mary K. Doyle provides comfort and hope by inviting the reader to return to traditional devotions to our Blessed Mother. Doyle highlights how hymns, prayers, the rosary, devotional art, and icons can assist in healing life's hurts. ACTA Publications, 2009. www.actapublications.com.

Depression can be crippling, not only to the person, but also their family. **Spirit and Dust: Meditations for Women with Depression** responds to the chronically depressed. The meditations are short, but touch at the

heart of women's experiences. There is a wonderful quote from St. Jane de Chantal, "And try, for the love of God, to restore your former strength by getting enough rest, physically and mentally, and by taking plenty of good, nourishing food." ACTA Publications, 2009. www.actapublications.com.

Lest we forget the obvious – **Retrouaille** and **The Third Option** are still excellent programs to assist the healing of troubled marriages. We salute their effort. www.retrouaille.org and www.thethirdoption.com.

Susan Vogt, the fearless editor of this journal, has authored a Catholic Update entitled **10 Tips for Married Couples: Love for the Long Haul**. It is a great handout for marriage enrichment programs and team couples working with the engaged.

www.foryourmarriage.org Again, remember to regularly check this foundational website. Currently the lead article is entitled **Internet pornography: Modern threat to marriage and families**. Also available for the hurting couple is the Rx section featuring articles by NACFLM members on challenging topics from in-laws to balancing family and work. Each article features a case study and discussion.

God On The Go is the New American Bible on flash drive. It's a first. If you're traveling and don't have access to the Internet, this is a handy alternative. See **ACTA Publications** for more information.

Is there a need for another volume on sex? If so, **What the Church Teaches About Sex: God's Plan For Human Happiness**, would be it. Robert Fastiggi surveys the Church's historical teachings on human sexuality and discusses five contemporary "hot button" issues. He is pastoral in tone and comprehensive in his review. Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2009. www.osv.com

Interested in how vocations are being presented. Get a copy of **Callings** - an hour-long documentary on work as a vocation. The DVD profiles individuals who believe they were called to a particular occupation and how they discerned that call. Cost: \$5. No, this is not a typo! www.callingsfilm.com

This is your column. Let me know what you're reading. I can be reached at wurbine@allentowndiocese.org. ■

Foundations

The Newsletter for Newly Married Couples

June 2009 • Vol XVII, No.1

A researcher was giving a talk and he introduced his topic by showing a picture of his family dog. The puppy was a cute little Bichon Frise, a fluffy little white thing with a perky face. You could just imagine it running up to you and giving your hand a lick. "The thing

Sometimes that is a great package deal, and other times it's more challenging.

with dogs," he then told his audience, "is that everyone falls in love with the FRONT end." He left the listeners to imagine cleaning up after the dog, taking it to the vet, and all the other things that come along with being a dog owner.

It's a little bit the same with in-laws.

You fall in love with this man or woman, and then there are the family members that come along with your beloved. Sometimes that is a great package deal, and other times it's more challenging.

In a recent study, researchers at Iowa State University did a four year long study of married couples, to see if their relationship to their in-laws changed over time, and if their in-law relationship impacted their marital relationship, or whether it worked the other way around.

With women, it seemed, the relationship with in-laws didn't have any effect on their relationship with their husband. Men, however, seemed to have a better relationship with their in-laws when they were more satisfied with their own marriage.



Meet the In-Laws

If you are able to open yourself to the experience of learning about the family you're becoming part of, there are bound to be things there that you admire. After all, they are the people who formed and shaped the person you're in love with. There must be some of the qualities you so admire in your spouse in the family he (or she) came from.

The other part, of course, is presenting your family to your spouse, trying to see them as someone looking in on them for the first time around. Let your spouse know the less obvious high points of your family. If your family is large, you might want to draw up a chart of who's who, so it is less confusing when he or she meets the whole group. Don't expect them to remember all the names immediately, but having had a little instruction from you beforehand can make those initial meetings easier.

Getting off on a good foot with in-laws will be good for your marriage now, and even more important when there are children. They will be the visible link between your family and the one you are marrying into. ■

There are many ways we can connect or disconnect with our spouse's family. These things can be seen as barriers to understanding or as opportunities for enrichment. If we differ, knowing our spouse's family gives us a peek into a way of life that our own family could not offer.

Class: do we know how to use all the forks on our mother-in-law's table?

Ethnic origin: do we understand the Italian customs around death, or the Turkish customs around childbirth?

Sectionalism: What's polite by Northern standards may not seem so by Southern standards; what's friendly in the East may not seem friendly in the West.

Religion: what religion you practice, how you practice it, and its importance in your life are aspects of difference between your family and your mate's.

Style: relaxed families, formal families, talkers, sports players – there are so many kinds of ways to be a family.

Sometimes we think in such large categories that we miss the small jewels that exist in our spouse's family system. It's good to take time to look at all the ways we can find something to relate to or enjoy in our spouse's family. ■

For the past 16 years *Foundations* has provided hands on, in home support for newly married couples. Beginning **June, 2009**, *Foundations* will appear in an updated, **four page format at a new price of \$10**. For more information on this excellent follow-up to diocesan or parish marriage prep programs, contact:

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UPCOMING ISSUES

Fall 2009 Theme:

National Pastoral Marriage Initiative

Submission deadline: 8-15-09

Winter 2010 Theme:

The Bible and Families

Submission deadline: 11-15-09

To submit an article for consideration, contact Susan Vogt, editor:

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Check our website:

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To become a member of NACFLM [click here.](#)

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NACFLM MISSION STATEMENT:

In response to God's word revealed through all generations and impelled by our belief in the intrinsic sacredness of family life, we the members of the

National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers

join together to be a prophetic voice for family in church and society,
to foster professional development,
and to provide mutual support for those who minister with families.