

## Making marriage work, after romance and glamour fade

By Father James Bacik  
NC News Service

It is difficult for couples approaching marriage to ask the most significant questions. Wedding preparations demand great attention to detail. Couples who have fallen in love tend to see the future in an optimistic light that obscures questions about future problems.

The pervasive cultural myth of stirring romances with happy endings can block critical inquiry into the realities of married life.

In this situation, pastoral ministers have the important task of helping couples ask the right questions — questions about improving communication, developing their spiritual lives and dealing with inevitable problems.

Couples need to learn more about each other's interests, strengths, weaknesses and foibles. Questions about child rearing, church participation and civic involvement should be discussed in depth.

One way of trying to penetrate the easy optimism of engaged couples is to ask what they will do when they "fall out of love." How will they respond when the glamour of romantic love fades, leaving the difficult task of making their marriage work?

F. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*, can be a helpful ally here. Writing out of his experience as a practicing psychiatrist, Peck makes a sharp distinction between falling in love and genuine human love, which he defines as the will to extend oneself "for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."

Falling in love, he says, is not a deliberate choice but a spontaneous response to another person perceived as sexually desirable. This romantic response is effortless and produces a sense that one has finally discovered the key to happiness. The heart soars and the world looks brighter.

That experience, however, does not guarantee the kinds of fruits that accompany genuine love — the expansion of personal horizons, for example, or reduced selfishness or mutual growth.

On the contrary, romantic love sometimes makes



people feel that they have reached the peak of personal fulfillment, and therefore are less inclined to pursue spiritual growth. Their relationships may become dependent and closed, thus precluding the opportunities for personal development provided by other people and situations.

"Falling in love" can retard mutual growth by creating the illusion of permanency. The couple simply

assumes that the positive feelings of attraction and liberation, which are so intense now, will automatically continue. This assumption prevents people from preparing for the time when such romantic feelings fade.

Unprepared for this terrible disappointment, couples often drift toward divorce without ever

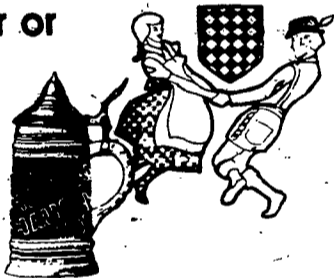
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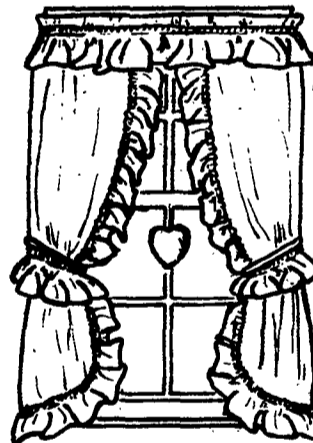
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