

# Families are called to be stewards of God's gifts

*The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity  
... the family is the foundation of society.*

*Pastoral Constitution  
on the Church in the  
Modern World, 52*

**By Mary and Bob Kambic**

In looking back on our 20 years together, we realized that it is important to work for the good of the world. A sense that unless we do what clearly needs to be done, it will not happen. This is a vision of Gospel witness, of how the world will be transformed if we do our part.

When we met, we both were involved in social change programs — Bob had returned from the Peace Corps in Nepal and Mary was working with anti-Vietnam-war groups.

From our small wedding in Pittsburgh in 1970, we tried to continue our involvement. The next 10 years saw us become involved in pro-life and natural family planning efforts. Our early marriage gave us the rare opportunity to work together for others, from within marriage. We thought of it as standing together facing outward and we tried to use our energies to renew the world.

A particular grace was the natural family planning job offered to us by the Franciscan Sisters at St. Joseph Hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. For several years this offered us stability while allowing us to establish and operate a shelter for homeless women and children. Of course, the fertile land of Lancaster reminded us of one of our favorite biblical themes, that of personal stewardship of ourselves and our children, the land and its resources.

The philosophy of stewardship — meaning taking care of rather than controlling God's creation — became more meaningful as we applied it to natural family planning by describing couples as stewards of mutual fertility; this implies working humbly together, with God, to exercise responsible parenthood.

Stewardship of fertility is in contradiction to contraception, which implies an individual is in control of his or her own fertility, with no mutual responsibility. Parents are also stewards of their children. Our children belong to themselves and God, but while they are young we are responsible for them.

Our children are constantly in the midst of family changes. They have seen many of our close personal friends suffer through at least one divorce, and our children's talks with the children in these families imparts an immediate understanding of family distress and its effects. A key lesson is that problems come to all kinds of families — even ones where people thought that they had done everything right.

Risk-taking is grounded in security. Parents provide security by "respecting and fostering personal dignity ... by means of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, availability, generous service ..." (*Familiaris consortio*). Concretely with our



children, we have tried with breast-feeding, reading and other close contact in the early years, and family vacations, discussions, and open interest in their lives in the teenage years, to help them on their own faith journey. We hope that exposure to our many different friends, those who share our

religious faith and those who do not, has been as beneficial for them as for us.

A more recent insight is that "some grace of the sacrament" of marriage can be reserved for the married couple — there is no need to spend all of our energies for others. We do wonder about the mystery of marriage. How two people find each other, become one, and remain together, cannot be explained by science.

For couples yet to be married, we would like to see improved marriage preparation classes that concentrate more on Catholic documents and teaching, rather than on finances, and "worldly interests" so prevalent now.

Looking forward to the future, we must constantly reevaluate and balance the needs of our family, families of origin, and the world in terms of what the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World calls us to do: "Families will share their spiritual riches generously with other families too" (No. 48).

With or without us, God's Kingdom is here. Hopefully, marriage is helping us to march on.

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