

Penfield pair conveys insights to the engaged

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PENFIELD — Early in her marriage, Lois Wieloch became rather upset when her young husband, Fran, lost several hundred dollars on stocks only a few months after making the investment.

"I threw the budget book across the room, and said, 'I'm saving the pennies, and you're throwing away the thousands!'" she recalled with a laugh.

The Wielochs have since shared as many decisions as possible in order to prevent such events from recurring. "I think it's more fun," Fran said of their practice of shared decision making. "It's also less burdensome. At one time, I used to think I had to make all the decisions."

At one time, the Wielochs thought a lot of things they've since come to find were mistaken. After 13 years of marriage, Lois and Fran Wieloch thought in 1976 that they had a decent marriage. Then they went on a diocesan-sponsored Marriage Encounter weekend.

"We definitely had begun to take each other for granted," Lois said, looking back at that stage of their marriage. Through Marriage Encounter exercises enabling them to talk about issues they had ignored or repressed, the Wielochs learned to be more considerate of each other.

The Wielochs were so enthusiastic about their new-found insights from the weekend that they decided to become presenters for Marriage Encounter weekends, which they conducted for the next several years.

In 1985, they decided to switch to doing presentations for Engaged Encounter because they wanted to help young couples to head off some of the obstacles they might stumble over on the road to fulfilling marriages. The Wielochs now serve as interim coordinators for the marriage-preparation program.

Engaged Encounter weekends are a diocesan-approved alternative to parish pre-Cana programs. Whereas parish-based programs consist of eight to 10 hours of classes scheduled over a series of weeks or days, Engaged Encounter is more like a weekend retreat. The encounter programs run from Friday to Sunday, and employ a series of topical presentations followed by one-on-one discussions between couples about various aspects of their life together.

Such exercises are important for those getting married, the Wielochs noted. "We saw that a lot of roots of the problems (discussed) in Marriage Encounter were because of a lack of communication," noted Fran Wieloch, who with his wife wanted to help young couples realize the need to develop this skill.

"We know how terrific marriage can really be, and we think a lot of couples don't realize that," Lois Wieloch said.

The husband-and-wife team pointed out



Fran and Lois Wieloch have been presenting Engaged Encounter weekends since 1985.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

that young couples need to know what tools they can use to build successful marriages. On their Marriage Encounter weekend, for example, the Wielochs learned constructive ways to argue. Spouses should avoid using such-phrases as "that's a woman for you," or "that's a man for you," which can freeze out their mates in an argument, Fran Wieloch noted, stressing the importance of listening to one's mate.

Engaged couples also need to know that arguments do not signal the death of a marriage, the Wielochs emphasized. "Before we went on Marriage Encounter, we were pretty proud of the fact that we never had a fight," said Lois Wieloch, who added that she and her husband had loathed arguing in their first decade or so together.

In those early years, Fran Wieloch would simply keep quiet when he was angry about something. "I guess I didn't know how to argue," he recalled. "I thought arguing was something bad."

He also recalled learning that it was healthy to examine his unexpressed emotions. "I used to think I just felt good or bad," Fran Wieloch said, noting that one of the presentation couples on the Marriage Encounter "asked us to start writing our feelings." The exercise was a revelation, he remarked. "I went through 20 different feelings in seven or eight minutes."

While the couple has learned to speak up
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