

Marriage

Continued from page 1

Thus Father Dave Faraone, parochial vicar at Our Mother of Sorrows Church at Paddy Hill in Greece, emphasized that couples should recognize that falling in love and loving each other are two different concepts.

"Marriage has to be a combination of both," Father Faraone remarked.

Even though the odds seem stacked against the lifetime survival of a marriage many couples do stay together for life. According to Father Joseph Champlin, pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Camillus — near Syracuse — and author of the popular marriage-preparation book "Together for Life," a strong sense of commitment is essential to marital success.

"Couples need a sense of hanging on," said Father Champlin, who was ordained 35 years ago this month. "Commitment forces people to reach down deeper and learn how to adjust in conflicting times."

Few people can understand that fact better than Charlie and Loree Dispenza, who have been married for 48 years. The Cohocton couple said sharing the desire to live a simple life has kept them happy for nearly a half century.

"We're satisfied with each other 6.9 days out of the week," Charlie joked.

The couple met July 4, 1942, on the tennis courts at what was then Mississippi State College. After a brief courtship, the two were married Oct. 31 of that year in Starkville, Miss. They have shared a simple, hard-working life ever since.

The Dispenzas said accepting each other for what they are — and not overanalyzing everything — helps keep their marriage uncomplicated.

"If you analyze everything, you'll find the bad things. If you analyze the bad things, you'll end up getting a divorce," said Charlie, a 1935 graduate of the Aquinas Institute.

The couple bought their present home in Cohocton in 1947, and opened their business, the Ridgecraft Motel, that same year. They have been partners in business, as well as marriage, ever since.

"If you can survive working together, you can survive anything in a marriage," Loree quipped.

The 78-year-old woman said the couple's adopted daughter, Sarah, has brought much joy to their lives. Loree also noted that one factor in the success of her marriage is that she and her husband have maintained separate interests while still sharing family time together. Charlie

agreed, adding that staying busy keeps the two from quarreling.

"When you have enough work to do and you like to work, it (the marriage) all falls in to place," said the 72-year-old husband.

The Kuryckis have also found that working together has made their marriage stronger, but it wasn't always so easy.

At the time of their wedding in 1973, Mary Rita was working for Gannett Rochester Newspapers, and Bob was working as an engineering consultant. They recall that their life together went rather smoothly for the first eight years of their marriage, despite their separate careers. But once they had their fourth child in 1985, the Kuryckis realized that something had to change.

"Work was taking up too much of my time, and I was taking my stress out on my family," said Mary Rita, who left her management position at Gannett in 1985 to take care of her family and help her husband with the engineering and machine-shop business he was slowly building.

"That was a very good time for us," Bob recalled. "We really felt like we were in it (the marriage) together then."

Spending too much time together, however, can cause problems, and successful couples have learned that they need patience and tolerance. Mary Rita said that it used to annoy her when Bob left his jeans on the floor. But one day she came to a realization that changed her life.

"When I bent down to pick up his pants one day, I smiled to myself and thought, 'I'd rather pick up his pants than have someone call and say he is dead and never coming home again,'" stated the 40-year-old Mary Rita, who no longer minds picking up after her husband.

Few couples, however, have the opportunity to grow closer by working together. For them, spending quality time — which often translates into spiritual time — with their spouses is important to revitalize their marriage.

Leo and Jean Vetter, for instance, have spent their weekdays apart throughout their 30 years of marriage. Leo worked for Xerox Corporation, while Jean stayed at home to raise their five children. But the Veters always set aside time for shared interests, including skiing and swimming, or sometimes just talking.

Father Champlin affirmed that communication is the single most important factor in a good marriage. "Couples have to let things surface when they have troubles, and not duck the issues," he remarked.

Shari Fischer, regional coordinator for marriage preparation and family ministry



The Veters agree that the husband is the head of the home, the wife the heart, and Jesus Christ the center.

in Monroe and Livingston Counties, said that a couple that does not know how to communicate will end up fighting and damaging their marriage.

"It's so important to take time out to understand each other," she said.

Noting that most couples entering marriage these days fall between the ages of 24-35, Fisher said couples tend to be more mature and ready to commit to each other when they are older. She added that she believes couples that marry later in life have a better chance at maintaining lifelong relationships.

"Some young people do make it, but if a person is older, they usually have been on their own for a while and are more secure with themselves," Fischer noted.

Father Faraone likewise has noted a trend toward longer engagements and couples marrying at an older age.

"It's more fruitful to work with a couple who has been together for several years," he observed, noting that if couples are too young, they lack a realistic idea of what marriage is really about.

Longer engagements can lead to greater knowledge of each other, noted Father Champlin, who added that a sense of security stems from a sense of identity. He stressed that successful couples know each other well and have realistic expectations as opposed to romantic dreams.

"I like to compare marriage to a rose. When they first start dating, couples are so in love that they only see the beautiful bud and don't realize that there will be thorns along the way. As soon as they get pricked and bleed a little, they think they made a

mistake and call it quits," explained the priest, who said that five of the 100 weddings he performed last year have already broken up.

Sustaining marriage amid the thorns is easier for couples who share a strong commitment to their faith, asserted Father Gerald Dunn, pastor at St. Theodore's Parish in Gates.

"The practice of religion is a great motivator in a marriage," said Father Dunn, who organized the Diocese of Rochester's pre-Cana program in 1958. "In every marriage, there are temptations and dangers, and couples need to have moral courage."

Sharing the Catholic faith has made all the difference for Clare and Dan Schreiber, who have been married for seven years and are expecting their third child.

Although they do not often speak specifically of their beliefs, they said they rely heavily on their shared Catholic values.

"Because we are Catholic, we have a strong commitment to marriage," explained Clare, who stays home with the children while her husband runs their farm. "Divorce is not an option for us," added the 29-year-old Clare.

Dan said his marriage is modeled in part after that of his parents, but he acknowledged that society presents different ideals for couples today.

"Everything in today's society is disposable," and people are all too willing to throw away marriages that are having problems, remarked 33-year-old Dan, who for the past five years has served with Clare as a pre-Cana counselor at Holy Trinity Parish in Webster.

After six years of counseling pre-Cana couples at St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Churchville, the Kuryckis noted that it is important for couples to be on the same moral wavelength.

"There is a hole in your life if you don't have a spiritual life," Bob remarked.

Although Mary Rita said she had not set out to marry a Catholic, she said sharing her faith is an important part of sharing her life with Bob.

"I'm glad I fell in love with a Catholic; it makes things so much easier," she said.

Sharing her husband's faith is likewise important to Loree Dispenza, who converted to Catholicism from the Southern Baptist Church before she married Charlie. She said she has never regretted her decision, and noted that having the same religion has brought the couple closer together.

The Dispenzas — who live next door to St. Pius V Church in Cohocton — often attend church services separately because of responsibilities at the motel, but they agree that the church has been a great comfort to them in their marriage.

"The faith is the most important thing," Charlie explained. "If you lost faith in God, and your mate, then boy are you in trouble."

The Veters have been professing their faith in God and each other since their dating days. According to Jean, the two spent many hours before their marriage on the phone sharing their thoughts about theology and coming to understand their relationship in relation to God.

Yet after 12 years, the couple had reached a "rut" in their marriage — as they noted almost all couples do — and decided to attend a marriage encounter retreat.

"It was perfect timing," said 55-year-old Leo. "It was time for a renewal because the noise level was high in our lives and we needed to hear the Lord's voice more clearly."

By keeping religion in the forefront of their daily lives, the Veters — who are currently planning the wedding of their eldest son — said they believe marriage can last forever.

"It has been proven to us in our every day life that only by the grace of God do we succeed in the undertaking of our marriage," Leo concluded.



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