

In-laws should avoid intruding on newlyweds

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

The best act of kindness in-laws can perform for their married offspring is to stay out of their business.

That is the consensus of a variety of experts on married life. In-laws staying on the sidelines of a new marriage is especially important, they stressed.

"Keep your opinions to yourself," advised Kathy Williams, who, together with her husband Mike runs the diocesan Marriage Encounter retreat program. The retreats are designed to help couples enrich their marriage.

"Let their relationship form," she continued. "Don't be too involved in the beginning."

Leslie Eccleston of Hamlin echoed Williams' comments as he reflected on his 28-year marriage to his wife, Rita. The Ecclestons attend St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish and have participated in Marriage Encounter weekends.

"In the beginning when Rita and I were first married, her mother and father bent over backwards to not interfere," Eccleston commented. He added that his in-laws were also careful not to take sides when either he or his wife would approach them about a disagreement.

Mark and Deanne McLellan of St. Stephen's Parish in Geneva attended one Marriage Encounter where a priest even suggested that parents try to see every disagreement — save the most grievous — from their son- or daughter-in-law's point of view.

"As in-laws, you understand that married life is full of ups and downs," Deanne McLellan said. "If the in-laws simply reinforce their child's feelings, they're not going to help at all," she added.

Indeed, parents can best help their children's marriages by listening to their concerns objectively and noting that most disagreements have their resolutions, Williams said.

"I think it's important to realize that these fights blow over," she said, adding that long after a couple resolves a dispute, one partner may remember



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Kathy Williams, co-coordinator, Diocesan Marriage Encounter

the unkind words his or her parents had for their child's spouse.

But playing the neutral observer of their offspring's marital disputes does not mean parents should leave their married children completely alone. In fact, a healthy relationship with one's in-laws can make for a healthier marriage, Williams noted.

"Be open to your son-in-law or daughter-in-law," Williams said.

For example, when Kathy got married to Mike Williams, her parents — who never had a son — virtually adopted him.

"Mike was like the son they never had," she said. "My father took him hunting and he taught him how to fish."

While visiting parents, a son or daughter should remember that their spouse may feel left out unless included in family activities, the McLellans observed.

"When you visit your in-laws, a son or a daughter tends to slip into their son or daughter role," Deanne McLellan said. Her husband added that spouses should make a point of doing nothing for their parents on a visit without at least letting their mate know what's going on.

Deanne McLellan concluded that the best way for parents to look at their child and his or her mate is the way the Catholic Church looks at them — two people joined to make one in a sacramental relationship.

Unfortunately, some parents never truly accept the person their son or daughter has chosen to marry. In such cases, spouses should make an effort to communicate their love for their mate, especially if that person feels inadequate in the eyes of their partner's family, observers noted.

Additionally, a spouse who feels spurned by a mate's parents should nonetheless remember that he or she married their offspring. When looking at such in-laws, "you just have to keep looking for the goodness in them that they have given the person that you've fallen in love with," Deanne McLellan concluded.

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