

Commitment is a waiting game in today's world

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have to do your growing up and marriage at the same time."

Father Thomas F. Leach, director of family life ministry for the Brooklyn diocese, said that in his diocese in 1988, some 8,000 church weddings were celebrated, compared to 6,500 in 1991.

He has found a majority of couples getting married today to be in their mid to late 20s or early 30s. He cites an increase in the numbers of second marriages.

"The reasons for the marriage delays are many, according to the priest.

A sluggish economy is one. A lot of couples insist on a "big church wedding," he said, and hold off because they cannot finance one. Another reason is an increase in cohabitation, he said.

Father Joseph M. Champlin, director of parish life and worship for the Syracuse diocese, and author of *Together for*

Life, a marriage-preparation book, said an informal survey done in one diocese showed that of 500 couples in marriage-preparation classes, almost 40 percent were living together. Some 90 percent, he said, had sex together prior to marriage.

As a result of such situations, he said, couples may feel less pressure to marry.

The priest said these realities should not change the church's task in terms of marriage preparation. "We need to welcome" the couples, he said.

Sister Markey said nationally, some 50-70 percent of couples are cohabiting. "Unfortunately the statistics wouldn't be much lower for Catholic couples," she said.

She attributed cohabiting couples' high breakup rates to cases in which one of the two feels pushed into making the commitment. In addition, the marital satisfaction of couples that co-

habited may be lower, she said, because they "used up the honeymoon period" while cohabiting and now view the less exciting second stage of the relationship as a consequence of their marriage rather than as the normal part of the relationship cycle.

Father Champlin said couples also are delaying marriage because of education plans, as well as out of "fear on the part of people because divorce is so prevalent."

Sister Markey agreed. "Young people see divorce all around them and don't want to be part of that. Some are coming from families of divorced parents and want to be very careful about who they choose to marry."

In general, Father Leach thinks the trend toward marrying later is a positive one. Many couples in their late 20s, he said, "have been out in the career world, have met a lot of people and

now know more what they're looking for."

He said danger signs for engaged couples include having different priorities and goals, vast differences in faith outlook, or financial and personality difficulties.

Father Champlin added to these "failure to communicate on major issues" and "basic emotional immaturity," which he said can be apparent through irresponsibility on the job, addictions or lack of temper control.

He said couples are up against a culture in which can be found "an enormous amount of insecurity, hidden resentments and poor self-esteem."

"It is a culture that doesn't enshrine permanence," he said. "Few people work the same job all their lives, or stay in the same place. There's an inability to deal with pain and conflict. All of this overflows into marriage."

Society influences marriage age

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in the work force has also made marriage less of a priority for young women.

"In the 1990s, there are certainly more opportunities for women to pursue their development," said Carroll. "In 1960, if women wanted to go to college, they could (only) be teachers and nurses."

Although marrying at an older age stands in stark contrast to perceptions of the 1950s, Boike noted that this is not a totally unique trend in American culture. In fact, he said, couples of the 1990s are historically similar to those of 100 years ago.

"At the turn of the (20th) century, people were getting married just a little younger than right now," the counselor said.

One couple that would certainly fit in at either end of the century is Michael and Doris Cota. Although the Webster residents are the same age and from the same home town of Massena, N.Y., they did not meet until five years ago — at the age of 40 — when Michael was living in Webster and Doris resided in Albany.

The Cotas dated for about 18 months before being married in July of 1989. It was the first marriage for both.

Although both spouses said they dated through their 20s and 30s, neither holds any regrets about not having married sooner.

"I don't think it matters whether you get married in your 20s, 30s or

40s, as long as it's for the right reasons. Too many people get married for the wrong reasons," Michael asserted. "I'll see people go to a wedding and say, 'That looks like fun, it looks like a great party.' And two months later they're married. Well, (marriage) is more than just a great party."

Doris agreed with her husband that marriage should not be approached simply as "the thing to do."

"A lot of times, couples in their 20s see their peers getting married and they say, 'I should do that, too. I don't feel, at times, they look at what (marriage) stands for,'" she said.

Doris has witnessed the negative side of people marrying before they're ready to handle a lifelong commitment. "When I was in my 20s and 30s, people I knew in my own age group were getting separated. It was almost as if they thought the grass was greener on the other side of the fence, that they were missing something," she said.

The Cotas have now begun the process of passing their wisdom along to other couples. Beginning next month, they will serve as marriage-preparation coordinators at their home parish of St. Rita's Church, 1008 Maple Drive.

"It's something you can do as a couple; it's important to do things together. Plus, we'll be helping others along at the same time," Doris concluded.

Father Curran

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ill? Those who experience physical decline with aging? People worried about being a burden?

"I think it will put pressure on people," he continued. "Besides, there's something to be said for Christians bearing other people's burdens."

Father Curran noted that another argument used in favor of euthanasia is patient autonomy. But, he said, "From a Christian viewpoint, you are not autonomous in the sense that you can do anything you want."

Finally, he said, the mystery of suffering is part of Christianity. People should not suffer for the sake of suffering, he said, but suffering has a value and meaning in the context of the cross.

Ultimately, he said, euthanasia offers too many dangers for society. Even permitting it under certain circumstances, he said, "gives more ammunition to euthanasia advocates."

During the interview, Father Curran offered a few insights into issues not covered in his St. John Fisher talk.

He declined to talk about abortion, noting that he had already made his views known on the issue. In the past, Father Curran has said he believes abortion is permissible under certain circumstances before individuation — which, according to Father Curran, occurs between the 14th and 21st day of pregnancy at which point he claims human life actually begins — or to save the mother's life.

Father Curran did, however, offer comments concerning the forces battling over the issue.

He noted that freedom of choice — as embodied in the Freedom of Choice Act currently under consideration by the U.S. Congress and which the Catholic Church and pro-life advocates oppose — "is absolutely the worst kind of argument for abortion. It's the cult of the individual run rampant."

Further, Father Curran observed that some pro-choice advocates opposed to pro-life protests at abortion clinics are forgetting that they have supported protests in the past over issues they favor.

"If you say that kind of protest is legitimate for one cause, you can't say (pro-life activists) can't do that at clinics," Father Curran said.

At the same time, the priest added, pro-life activists consistently fail to take into account that most abortion advocates simply do not recognize the fetus as a human being. Thus arguments about killing babies have no meaning to pro-choice advocates.

In looking at the controversies surrounding his own teachings, Father Curran said, "Most people have not read what I say. They get it through hearsay. They think it's more liberal than it is."

He noted that the actions against him and other theologians, as well as the *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, released by the Vatican in June, 1990, "is part of a broader reality. There's no doubt of the tendency in the last 13 years to put a much greater control over theologians."

"There's no doubt that the church, in terms of the Vatican, has moved to the right in the last few years," Father Curran concluded. "The question is, have the other people in the church moved?"

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