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Role models

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ana's parents, Frank and Maria Nicoletta of Clyde, members of St. John the Evangelist Parish who have been married about 30 years.

"Basically, they took me in from the start," he said. "They would do anything for me and I appreciated that."

He was invited to family dinners, Christmas dinners, received birthday gifts and, most important, "Even if I wasn't hungry, they'd feed me."

That hospitality carried over into their marriage as well, he said. The couple tried to create a welcoming home for guests when they lived in a Rochester apartment.

A few years ago Mark converted to Catholicism so both could attend the same church.

"I thought it was very important from a marriage standpoint," he said. He joined St. John's in Clyde, but the couple usually attends St. Patrick's in Savannah, where he's a lector. And there, they have discovered more role models.

"... you happen to see couples and families that fit the classic mode you see in TV shows," Mark said. "They all come to church together. They all sit together and hold hands, the husband kisses his wife during the greeting. That stands out in my mind - families that aren't afraid to show love for each other."

In Ithaca, Jay True, 40, of Immaculate Conception Parish, admires couples who seem "in sync" with each other. His composite role model would be a couple who shares things, "couples that build things together, be it family or good works," and couples who enjoy each other's interests, whether or not they share in them.

"We're learning," he said, adding that he has come to understand the term "partnership," in his four-year marriage to Sandy. "One person can't be committed. It takes two."

They had a hard time conceiving a child, Jay noted, and suffered through second thoughts and long dealings with medical professionals. The happy news is that little



Newlyweds Steven and Betty King, shown here, say such couples as Wes and Lynn Kennison of Genesee are inspiring to them.

Alexander was born two months ago.

"We're thrilled," Jay said.

Sandy (nee Meek), 41, was raised as an only child, and appreciates her husband's "strong sense of community" and that he has a family that "celebrates everything together."

She converted to Catholicism a few years ago from Presbyterianism, after studying with Jay as her RCIA mentor.

Jeffrey and Kelly Knight of Pittsford, who married Nov. 9, 1996, at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua, wouldn't think of making a major decision without consulting their parents.

"I know we both look to our parents," Kelly said. "Both sets were very good role models."

When she and Jeffrey met, she said she was impressed that, "Here we were two people with the same religion, our parents were together, and very strong in their marriages."

"We talk about our parents a lot and talk to our parents a lot. We rely a lot on them for support for us," Kelly, 25, said.

Jeffrey, 29, admitted that, "Since we have been speaking about marriage, I probably have more respect than in the past. ... You start doing it yourself and realize it isn't always that easy."

Their parents, Pat and Dick Rohrer of Canandaigua and Ellen and Glenn Knight of Pittsford, have been married about 34 and 36 years, respectively.

"I would hope we are just as loving as they are and willing to show it, in 34 years,"

Kelly said.

Dave Johnson, 39, of Liverpool, said he's noticed that many other people just don't seem to get past problems, but his parents, Charles and Patricia Johnson of Holley, have in their 45 years of marriage.

"They stand out in my mind," he said. "They always look for the good."

Dave married Kathy Ganey Johnson Oct. 5, 1996, in St. Joseph's Church in Weed-sport. Their good friends, Mary Beth Duffy-Hasenauer and Tom Hasenauer of Manchester, were approved as their marriage preparation counselors, Kathy said.

"We've known each other 21 years," Kathy, 39, said of Mary Beth, a friend from their days at Le Moyne College in Syracuse. Ever since the couple married 13 years ago, she said, she's admired what they have.

"I can best describe it as respect and communication they share. Those are the two big things," she said. "Their level of communication, their familiarity with each other because of the years they've shared ... it is that openness in the house and you certainly feel it."

A Waterloo couple, Tonimarie Costantino, 22, and Jason Hergert, 23, married Aug. 16, 1996, at St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls, also look at examples set by their marriage preparation counselors, as well as their parents and grandparents - who have been married 50 years.

"I think that's a long time to be married," Tonimarie said of her grandparents. "They're a wonderful example of what marriage can be."

Her grandfather, Tony Carnevale of St. Patrick's Parish, recorded advice for them on their wedding video.

"He told us to love each other no matter what, always be strong, think about everything we do and what the consequences will be," she said. Tonimarie also looks to friends Vince and Janet Enos at St. Patrick's Parish as role models.

"Their children and their families are their priorities," Tonimarie said, noting the couple turns down many an invitation to go out, in order to spend time with their two children.

And, noted Jason, "They respect each other's space. They realize you don't have to

be constantly involved in each other's lives."

When Vince is out fixing cars in his garage, he said, "it cuts off time they're both together but she goes along with that."

He also pointed to Joe and Anne Denny, who teach religious education with them, and who spoke at their marriage preparation sessions.

"They're very understanding of each other, the way they talk and explain their relationship," he said. "They seem relaxed, laid back, nothing really shocks them."

These role models, and countless others, are helping accomplish what the Catechism of the Catholic Church prescribes:

"So that the 'I do' of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance," it states.

"The example and teaching given by parents and families remain the special form of this preparation."

"The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the 'family of God' is indispensable"

Such examples are vital "because there is so much divorce nowadays," said Father Raymond Booth of St. Paul's Church in Webster. He tries to highlight such role models when meeting with engaged couples.

"If it applies, I hold up the parents or grandparents to them," he said.

Additionally, 12 couples on St. Paul's marriage preparation teams serve as examples. And their work means a lot to him, he said.

"Years ago the priest would do the marriage preparation en masse," the pastor explained. "Literally we'd have 50 to 100 couples come together, which just is not a good situation."

Now couples spend some 10 hours over a weekend or a few weeks in marriage preparation, face-to-face in small groups with a couple and then with themselves.

What they take home, he said, "is the fact that after all these years they (the present couples) still enjoy each other, still are good friends and laugh together and enjoy a good time together, that it's never grown old, the love they have for each other."

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