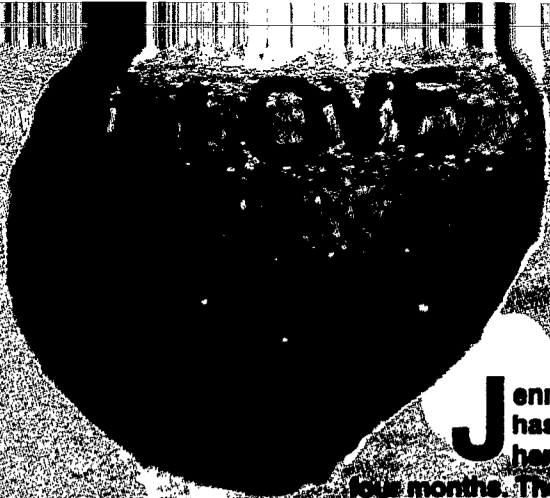


MONITOR

Story by Mike Latona



Those magic words!
I love you.

Jennifer Frisch has been dating her boyfriend for four months. They get along quite well, she said, and their relationship has many components that could lead to love.

So isn't it getting to be about time for them to utter those three special words — "I love you" — to each other?

Whos, not so fast!

"I'm not going to say it until I'm absolutely sure. It's important to wait until you absolutely mean it," said Jennifer, 16, a parishioner at St. Rita's Church in Webster.

Diocesan teens noted that "I love you" can take on many meanings depending on who is expressing — and receiving — that sentiment.

But of all the various scenarios — such as thank-you, goodbyes, a note of affection to a family member or friend — they agreed that romantic relationships are where the utmost caution should be observed before that phrase is uttered.

"You can say you love your pet, you can say you love your bike, you can love to play sports. But it's different when you wholly love a person," Jennifer explained.

To get to the point where you feel comfortable enough to say the magic words, Jennifer said, "it takes building trust, and that can take a long time. You have to know the person inside and out."

Bethany Blodgett added that teen couples, especially, shouldn't jump the gun on saying "I love you" — even if they feel they might be falling in love.

"Sometimes you may think you're in love, but that's not always true in a high-school relationship," said Bethany, 16, from St. Lawrence Church in Greece.

Jennifer agreed that couples with little experience in romantic relationships should be careful about saying those words prematurely.

"Once you start off like that, where do you go from there?" she queried.

She added that she's aware of such television shows as "The Love Boat," in which couples proclaim their love for each other within days of their first meeting. That's hardly in tune with reality, she noted. She said that romance novels, also, may lead people to think the ability to say "I love you" is something that comes rather easily and quickly.

"To show relationships like that, I think, is absolutely ridiculous," Jennifer commented.

Despite the trickiness of verbalizing romantic love, Jennifer stressed that teens shouldn't be hesitant to state their love for family members — even though conflicts arise from time to time.

"Deep down you love them. So you should definitely tell them," she said.

Jon Teets made a similar distinction. He said he feels very comfortable telling his parents he loves them, but he wouldn't just blurt those words out while dating.

"It's a fairly big step in any relationship," said Jon, 18, from the Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads.

Joe Lazzaro said he can verbally share his love with his parents, grandparents and close friends. But in a new dating situation, he wouldn't either want to say — or hear — the words any time soon.

"If it's from a girl I've only known a little while, it might get my head a little freaked out," said Joe, 16, from St. Patrick's Church in Seneca Falls.

Bethany added that if she were the object of somebody's verbal love, she wouldn't automatically return the sentiment.

"It would be a very awkward situation. But I wouldn't say it back if I didn't feel it," she said.

So when, exactly, is the proper moment to say that short and powerful sentence?

"I think it's just something you say at the right time — and that's different for just about everyone," Jon remarked.

It just comes up and you've got to say it. It just kind of comes out," agreed Kristine Whitman, 16, from St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville.

Bethany also observed that a relationship doesn't have to be romantic in order for two people to be able to say "I love you." She noted that her best friend is a male teen, and they exchange "I love yous" quite regularly.

"We're incredibly close. We've talked every day on the phone for the past eight months," Bethany said. "Once we established a trust with each other, we were okay with it."

But she realizes, also, that such an arrangement can be tricky.

"With a guy, there's always a chance for romance. So you don't want to give them the wrong impression," Bethany said.

On the other hand, Jon remarked that saying "I love you" does not always have to be a dramatic pronouncement.

"People say it a lot if you do something nice for them," he said. "You can definitely tell if they mean it one way, or it's just a comment."

Joe said that he's comfortable being told "I love you" in a casual, friendly sense.

"It's a good thing to know that somebody loves you. So I definitely would say thanks to them," Joe said. "It depends on the implication. It can mean something very serious, or it can be friendship. People basically know whether you're pouring your emotions out, or you're just saying it."

Jon and Joe admitted that when it comes to verbally expressing feelings of love, males face more of a struggle than females.

"Girls are more comfortable expressing their feelings," Jon said.

"I think it's harder for guys to admit their emotions," Joe agreed. He added that he might say "I love you" to a male friend, but would fear being made fun of if other people overheard.

"Not if you're with a large group of people," Joe commented.

Bethany noted that her older brothers never tell her that they love her, "because they're all macho," she said with a laugh.

At the same time, Bethany said, "Even though they don't say it to me, I know it's there."

Bethany and Jennifer said that many people may actually feel love, but be scared to say the words.

"I think that, especially for those who are introverted, they have a problem expressing themselves," Bethany said. "They might have a fear that someone's not going to say it back to them."

"It's important to love yourself before you can love someone else," Jennifer remarked. "If you're self-conscious and afraid of ridicule, you might be afraid to say it. But if you love yourself and have confidence, it's easier for you to tell people you love them."



Coming next week:
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By Rob C... Staff writer

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