

FEATURE

Program aids couples' focus

The focus is on marriage preparation in a new program the diocese is using to counsel engaged couples. "FOCCUS" Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study... is catching on in dioceses around the world.

"It's really to help couples learn their strengths in their relationship and their weaknesses, so they can begin to work on them," said Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

The diocese trained representatives from 51 parishes last September to use the new program. Within about a year, every couple preparing for marriage should be using the program, she said.

The diocese is encouraging deacons, pastoral administrators and priests to train for FOCCUS, Sister Dietz said. In addition, some parishes are designating lay couples to take the training.

The new program complements traditional marriage preparation the diocese requires, she explained. She added, "What the FOCCUS program does is allow for some individual attention."

The couple discusses various statements with their trained parish facilitator, who later provides them with an analysis. The couple then can use the analysis to work on certain areas, for example, in required marriage preparation sessions.

Discussion categories include interfaith marriages, second marriages, cohabiting, dual career and parenting issues.

Why some priests 'hate' weddings

By Father Eugene Hemrick
Catholic News Service

During a gathering with my priest classmates, we shared reflections on our years in ministry. One classmate told how he had left the priesthood and then happily returned, and another talked about his duties as a new pastor.

Then there was the classmate who blurted out passionately, "I hate performing weddings!" You could tell he really didn't like them because these were the first words out of his mouth. The fact is that many priests feel the same way he does. Let's take a look at a few reasons why.

The night before their wedding, a couple and their wedding party often enough do not arrive on time for the rehearsal. When they do arrive, they may be rowdy, joking around and talking loudly.

And then there are the little oddities like a flower girl who is too shy to walk down the aisle and needs coaxing or the little boy who carries the pillow for the rings and runs down the aisle, thinking the ceremony is fun time.

Meanwhile, in the choir loft, the cantor or musicians are practicing their music, adding to the bedlam, or there is a person charged with the wedding's details who is trying to take charge. And of course, there is always confusion about how people should line up for the procession and the speed at which they should process.

Priests normally handle these annoyances well either by demanding order or just overlooking them. One thing that especially aggravates them is when the bride's parents try to take command or demand that their daughter's wedding resemble hers.

A priest once told me that what partic-



said sadly.

As nerve-racking as wedding rehearsals and weddings themselves can be, this, is not what most causes priests to dislike officiating at them. Rather, it is the way some couples disregard the sacramental nature of what they are doing.

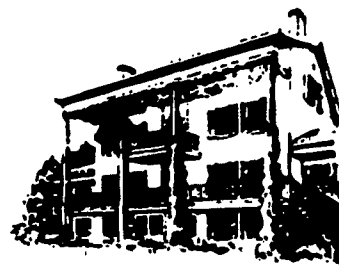
It is not uncommon that they are living together before marriage, that they rarely participate in Sunday Mass. If they have a Mass on their wedding day, often they are unable to recite the common prayers and have no idea when to stand and kneel.

What bothers priests most and, I might add, hurts them is seeing young people making the most important decision of their life with little reference to God. It is difficult enough for couples who practice their faith to stay together and to respond effectively to the pressures of our times!

Fortunately, most weddings aren't like this, and one of a priest's greatest joys is sharing the joy of couples about to be married. These weddings are a reminder of the wedding banquet we hope to enjoy in heaven.

When, however, weddings aren't like this, they remind us of the chaos that existed before life in which God had to create something out of nothing.

ularly bothered him were weddings modeled on frivolous soap-opera ceremonies in which the presiding minister is pictured as a daffy clergyman, those attending the wedding are portrayed as dimwits, and the bride and groom are in total disarray. "Our young people have no real sacred model of marriage to emulate," he



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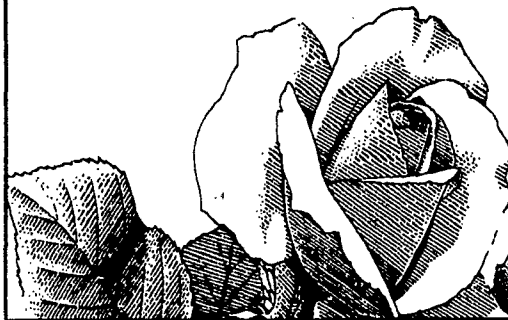
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