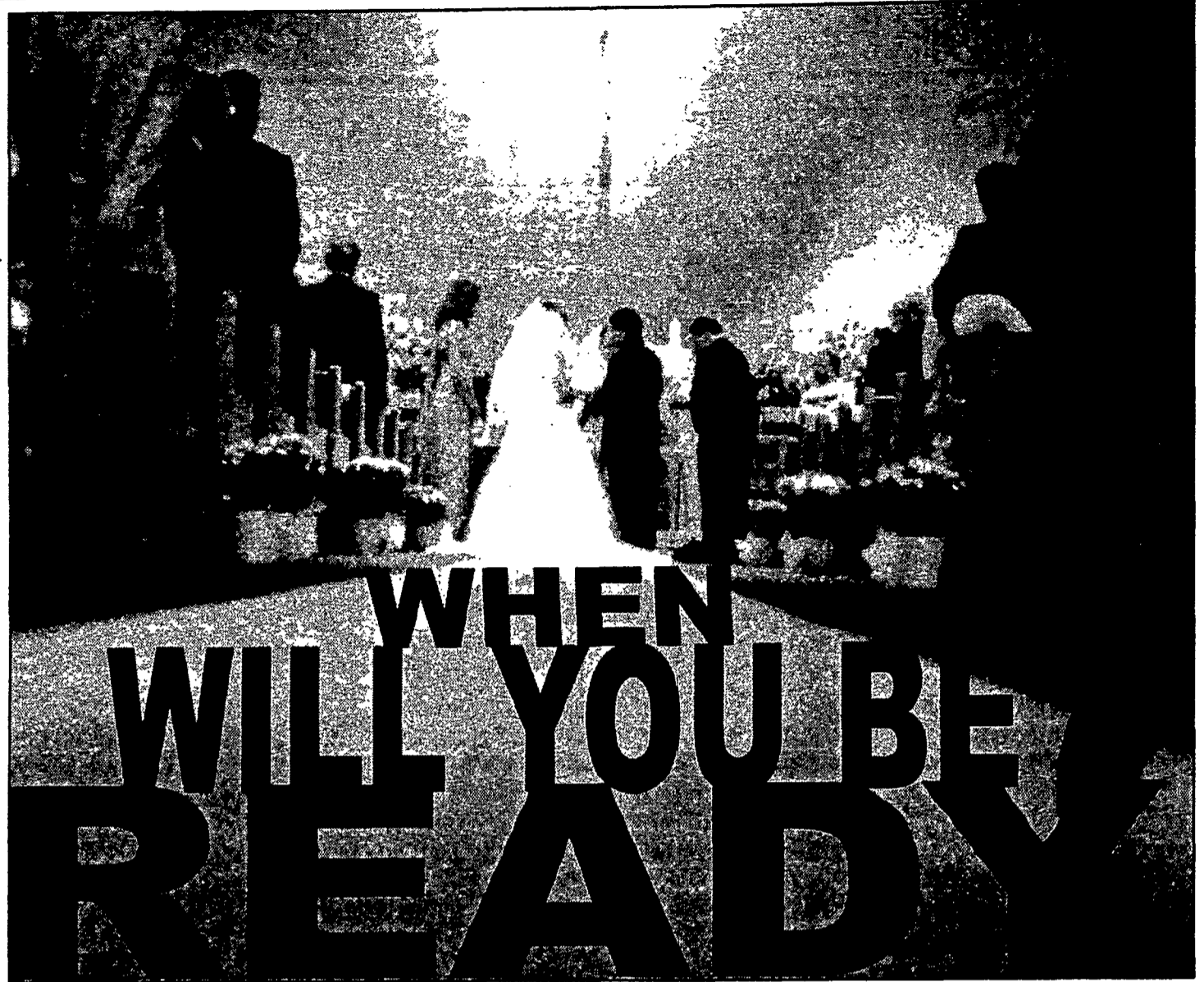


On the MOVE

Story by
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Photo
Illustration by
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As Shauna Gentile describes her ideal wedding day, you can practically see her riding off into the sunset with her handsome prince.

"I pretend where I want my wedding to be. Where my honeymoon is going to; I want it in Hawaii. Stuff like that," said Shauna, 14.

Added Amanda Skelly, 18: "I don't think any girl walks past that bridal shop without saying 'Oh, that's really pretty!'"

But what about *being* married, not just *getting* married? You know, spending 50 or 60 years with the same person?

"That's weird," remarked Janelle Varin, 14. Shauna, Amanda and Janelle belong to the youth group at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Scottsville. In a recent *Catholic Courier* interview of seven members, the teens voiced caution about the prospect of a lifelong commitment with one person.

"If I get married I want to be very, very sure I want to spend the rest of my life with that person," Amanda said.

Melissa Torpey, 15, said that you should only get married "if you're able to picture yourself with that person in 50 years, having a fight with that person and getting through it, having a baby and getting through it."

Brennen Colwell, for one, doesn't think he's anywhere close to being able to make that commitment, even though he said he'd like to get married someday.

"Marriage would get in the way of some things I want to do with my life — soccer, college, racing mountain bikes," said Brennen, 14.

Shauna said that she, also, wants to enjoy her young adulthood as a single person: "When you're younger, in your 20s, you can go out to clubs and dance with people."

No matter how long you wait to exchange nuptials, Dennis Reno said, you'll be in for some major adjustments after that day has passed.

"I don't know if anybody's every really 'ready' to get married — sharing a home,

sharing a bathroom, making plans on a daily basis. Things change especially when you start having children," remarked Reno, St. Mary's youth minister, who has been married 22 years.

Robert Makuch, 16, agreed that marriage is not to be taken lightly. "It's a really big responsibility. There are going to be a lot of temptations you'll have to overcome," he said, such as thinking about cheating on your spouse.

Robert thinks that today's society is too bent on instant gratification, and many marriages crumble as a result. "People are in it just for themselves," he said.

Amanda's twin sister, Cassandra, stated that because divorce has become so common, she believes couples are more prone to separate when their marriage hits a snag.

"People don't try as hard anymore to work out their differences. If divorce wasn't accepted, a lot more marriages could be saved because people would work things out," Cassandra commented.

Amanda and Cassandra's parents divorced when the twins were less than 5 years old. Amanda acknowledged that her family history affects her own attitude about marriage, saying, "It depends on how your

parents' marriage was."

Why does marriage seem more complicated now? One reason, the St. Mary's teens said, is that tougher economic conditions force many couples to both work in order to maintain a decent standard of living.

"Women weren't expected to go out and get a job like they are now," Brennen said.

Though it's natural to be skeptical, Reno suggested that young Catholics can improve their outlook by viewing marriage from the church's perspective — as a precious sacrament. Amanda agreed that couples who trust in God stand a better chance of succeeding in a marriage.

"You have to have faith; you can't just rely on yourselves," Amanda said. "You have to give it up to God. Marriage doesn't take two people, it takes three."

After all, Robert said, the church says that marriage is to be a wonderful step in life, not a dreary one.

"To share your life with somebody — it's a sacrament you should enjoy," he remarked.

**COMING NEXT WEEK:
Award-winning football player**

New program to target teens

Sister Karen Dietz, SSJ, said it's not too early for teens to begin thinking about marriage in the Catholic Church. However, she added, deep reflection about the sacrament often doesn't occur until a couple is engaged and taking the required marriage-preparation class.

And that can be too late in the game, Sister Dietz said, especially in the age of rising divorce rates and negative media influence regarding marriage.

"Young people enter marriage assuming it's going to be forever. We have people who come to us for marriage preparation and say, 'Why do we have to do this?'" remarked Sister Dietz, the diocesan coordinator of sacramental catechesis.

"Statistics show that more than ever teens are coming from broken homes. The church has a responsibility to prepare them better," Sister Dietz commented. "I think we're doing young people a disservice if we don't let them know the church is there for them at all stages of life."

Sister Dietz's department has designed a marriage program to be used optionally by Catholic schools, youth groups and high-school religious education classes. Aimed specifically at teens, it will be introduced as a pilot program in some parishes over the next few months with wider implementation planned by September.

The program was developed by Alice Miller-Nation, pastoral associate at St. Joseph/St. William Parish in Livonia/Conesus, and Jeanne Shanley, former staff member at Rochester's Holy Family Church. The content highlights Scripture passages related to marriage, such as 1 Cor. 13 ("Love is patient, love is kind...") the presence of God in a marriage; determining a couple's readiness for marriage; how to work through conflicts; the sacrament of marriage as a lifelong commitment; and the circumstances by which the Catholic Church allows for a marriage to be dissolved or annulled.

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