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Focusing

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the engaged couple sat down at separate tables to complete the FOCCUS inventory.

"We would tell them there are no wrong answers," Mike Stapleton said. The questionnaires were sent out for processing and returned to the Stapletons to discuss with the couple. The questionnaire is designed so that a couple can't really guess which areas will show most agreement, disagreement or need for attention.

Sometimes FOCCUS prompts a marriage-preparation counselor to refer a couple for more specialized help.

Sometimes the process helps isolate areas where the couple had no idea they differed, and therefore sets off a series of discussions. Sometimes, it helps a couple realize they aren't ready for marriage, but instead, may be being pushed into marriage by a grandmother or aunt, Sister Markey said.

She recalled that in dealing with a new company to produce computer software discs for her program, she encountered a young woman who had completed the inventory.

"She said, 'When my fiance and I took it three years ago, we discovered all these things where we were in disagreement and backed off. We took it again a month ago and we're in a whole different place.'"

The pre-marriage inventory gives a couple time to deal with their decision, she said. Some have a "vague anxiety" about their marriage that FOCCUS helps them identify and address.

"It names what maybe they were afraid to name," Sister Markey said. In other cases, it gives them assurance that — despite what problems they may have seen relatives or friends endure — they can recognize such difficulties and talk about them.

So how does FOCCUS differ from some forms of pre-Cana counseling? For one



thing, it is objective, Sister Dietz noted. "Especially if (parish leaders) know the couple, it's hard to get some distance, which is the beauty of FOCCUS. It provides the objective look at the relationship. It's not designed as a test. It's really designed to give the couple the best possible chance to make this marriage work. It points out the strengths they have as a couple. It also points out where they need to do more."

It is not necessary for an engaged couple to be in 100 percent agreement, she added.

One of the most emotionally laden aspects of married life is handling money, Sister Markey noted. The inventory helps point out differences, many of which have to do with the way people were raised, she said.

A woman may have been raised in a family that spent to show they cared. Feeling that spending — no matter the risk — shows that a couple believes in its future together, she may say, "If you loved me, you'd spend."

The man may come from a family that didn't spend until it had saved the cash and

say, "If you loved me, you'd save."

"Under the heading of communications, money is probably the most emotional topic," Sister Markey said. "It's not just about money. It's about meaning, value, prestige and style."

To complicate matters, some individuals may want to repeat what they learned growing up; others may want to react against what their family taught them.

"When they know what's going on, most couples can step back and decide what they are going to do,"

she said.

Sister Markey, a clinical psychologist, helped develop FOCCUS 17 years ago. She said about 120 dioceses have a policy adopting it as a tool for marriage preparation. And 40 others have hundreds of parishes using it. It also is used by other denominations.

Although the Diocese of Rochester adopted the program about three years ago, Church of the Resurrection has been using it much longer, since a couple who moved to the area introduced parish ministers to it. About 130 parish ministers have been trained at about 60 parishes and four college campuses to use FOCCUS, according to Sister Dietz. The diocese has the software to process the inventory so it doesn't have to be sent to Omaha, where the program is based. The diocese charges \$10 per couple.

The diocese didn't replace other tools with FOCCUS. It is used as a faith-based tool and is encouraged along with pre-Cana, a single day of presentations by a couple and small group work; or Engaged

Encounter, usually an intensive two-night program.

Sister Markey has noticed trends in her years administering the program, which also has components addressing interfaith marriages, cohabiting couples and second marriages.

"I think time has become an even bigger problem with couples," she said. "Time and priorities."

Development of the two-career family is a major change in the past 20 years, she noted, pointing to the need for two jobs to support a family, as well as the availability and the desire to pursue two careers. Yet only one-fourth of couples today grew up in a home in which the mother and father both worked full-time, she said.

Thus, today's marrying couples "don't have the models for how do you manage the home," she said. "Who does what housework, whose job takes priority?"

Sister Markey observed that FOCCUS gets the "greatest flak," for this question about fidelity: "I could not under any condition remain married to my spouse if he/she were ever unfaithful to me."

"We certainly were not saying (fidelity) doesn't matter," she said. "We were just saying pay very good attention to what is going on — there is infidelity of time, infidelity of friendship before you get to sexual infidelity."

Again, the issue is encouraging couples to talk, she said. FOCCUS and Engaged Encounter give couples the "best marriage counseling the church offers," said Stapleton, who has been married for 33 years. While he was fortunate to have good roots for understanding what a sacramental marriage was, he said, many kids today don't.

"Pre-Cana is fine, but we never felt it is enough," he said. "When you look at our church's sacramental preparation overall, it takes more to be confirmed, to have a baby baptized, to receive first Communion and first penance than it does to make a lifetime commitment."

"You are choosing to be married in church because it is important to you," Sister Dietz said, "and we want to meet these needs — needs you don't even know you have yet."

"It's because the church really cares about your life together," she remarked.

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Pope

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with his warning that doctors incur automatic excommunication if they help women obtain abortions.

"They are completely different things," he said, not only because abortion entails a much graver evil — the killing of an innocent human life — but also because the doctor actually performs the abortion while the lawyer simply represents a client.

In Italy, despite being a majority Catholic country, the pope's appeal to lawyers was not well received. According

to a Datamedia Research poll of 1,000 people, 87.5 percent of Italians said they disagreed.

Interestingly, in a similar poll, 71 percent of Italian adolescents between 14 and 17 said they "agree with the pope and consider divorce a true plague that jeopardizes the psychic equilibrium of the children."

An editorial in *La Repubblica*, a major daily newspaper, accused the pope of attempting to impose religious strictures and turn Italy's secular state into "a fundamentalist or Taliban republic."

But Francesco D'Agostino, president of the Union of Italian Catholic Jurists, called the pope's words a welcome appeal

to lawyers to exercise more responsibility for their clients' actions and for the good of society.

"The majority of lawyers try to accelerate the divorce process as much as possible and to obtain the best economic result for the side that they are defending," he said. "It should not be like this."

D'Agostino said the pope's description of divorce as a devastating phenomenon was "an exact photograph of the social reality today," not a strictly religious judgment.

"The fact that the juridical order provides for divorce does not mean that divorce should be banally accepted or promoted," he said.

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