

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

SPECIAL 2015 SUPPLEMENT ON WEDDINGS

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A Catholic wedding checklist

BY KAY COZAD

You're engaged and it's time to map out a plan for what will be the start of a new life of marital love for you and your spouse. To create a meaningful Catholic wedding it is important to remember that the celebration of marriage is not just a ceremony, but a sacrament. The elements of the ceremony you choose will speak to those in attendance of your values and hopes for your marriage.

The informative website, www.foryourmarriage.org, offered by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), presents a plethora of information on Church teachings concerning the sacrament of Marriage and all that it entails.

It states, "In the Catholic Church, Marriage is a sacrament. All sacraments are to be celebrated because they are encounters with Jesus Christ. A wedding celebrates Christ's gift of marital love to this particular man and woman. It is a time for rejoicing."

The following are general guidelines for planning a memorable Catholic wedding compiled from information found at www.foryourmarriage.org, www.theknot.com and www.ehow.com.

Twelve months prior to the wedding

- Select a church. Some parishes require one member of the couple to be a registered member.
- Meet with the pastor or deacon to select a wedding date and time, and discuss the parish requirements for a wedding celebration. Many parishes have wardrobe restrictions, including requiring the bride to cover her shoulders during the wedding.
- Choose one of three Rites of Marriage to celebrate: Wedding



celebration within a Mass for two Catholics; celebration without Mass, structured around the Liturgy of the Word when a Catholic marries a baptized Christian; and celebration without Mass when a Catholic marries a non-Christian.

Nine months prior to the wedding

- Select readings (traditionally, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and one from the Gospels) and Prayers of the Faithful from the approved texts.

A note about budgets

Developing a realistic budget for your wedding may seem a daunting task. Costs vary between regions but according to www.costofwedding.com "the majority of couples typically spend between \$18,900 and \$31,500 on weddings in the U.S.

From the wedding dress to the reception decorations and entertainment, wedding costs can add up quickly. But a little research and careful planning can help keep costs to a minimum.

According to the USCCB sponsored website www.foryourmarriage.org, the U.S. bishops have not specifically addressed the issue of spending, but put forth a few questions for couples to answer to keep costs in perspective. Answer the following questions to shape a personal view of what is truly important in a wedding celebration.

- What do you want the wedding to say about you and your values?
- Are you willing to go into debt, or put family members in debt, because of this wedding?
- Are you willing to focus time and energy on the details of a lavish wedding? Will this reduce the attention you can pay to preparing for the marriage itself?
- Do you feel comfortable with the amount you plan to spend? Have you considered this in relation to the needs of people in your community?

- Select family members or friends in good standing with the Church, who will be lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and those who will carry the offertory gifts if Mass will be celebrated.

- Meet with parish music director to select sacred music that will be used at the Mass or ceremony.

- Select the bridal party, who will not only be attendants but witnesses of the marriage rite as well. Traditionally, the Church prefers the maid of honor and best man to be Catholic.

- Discuss dates to attend pre-marital classes or a preparation program required by the Church and engagement retreats hosted by the diocesan Office of Family Life.

Six months prior to the wedding

- Design or select, and order, wedding invitations to be sent to guests.
- Create your guest list.

Three months prior to the wedding

- Meet with the parish wedding representative or pastor to discuss decoration requirements, which may include placement and size of floral arrangements.
- Discuss seating arrangements for family members.

Two months prior to the wedding

- Finalize the invitations, ceremony details and vows.
- Publish a wedding announcement in the local newspaper and the church bulletin.
- Book a location for the rehearsal dinner.
- Prepare and mail wedding invitations.

Three to four weeks prior to the wedding

- Meet with the parish priest or deacon to discuss last minute details.
- Send rehearsal dinner invitations, if appropriate.

One to two weeks prior to the wedding

- Touch base with your priest.

Day before the wedding

- Participate, with priest and wedding party, in a rehearsal ceremony.
- Pray!



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But as a gift

BY ALLISON CIRAULO

When my husband and I were preparing for our wedding Mass, we decided that we would like to memorize our vows. It seemed important that we speak the words ourselves, rather than repeating them after the priest or summing them up with a simple “I do.” I still have the sweat-stained, slightly crumpled notecard with our vows written on it that my husband nervously used to practice even moments before the Mass began. We both managed to remember all the right words and breathed a sigh of relief that we hadn’t missed one of those hallowed promises.

What we promised, of course, was to be true to each other “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health,” to love and honor one another “all the days of my life.” We also promised to “accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church.” We made this vow knowing that to be joined as husband and wife would simultaneously unite us in the work of bringing new life into the world, what “*Gaudium et Spes*” calls the “ultimate crown” of conjugal love (GS No. 49). We promised to be, in contemporary Catholic parlance, “open to life.”

My husband and I began our marriage firmly convinced of the Church’s teaching on married love and fairly confident in our understanding of natural family planning. When family or friends asked about children, we explained what it meant for us to be open to life and the beautiful teachings of the Church on the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2363).

In the summer of 2013, in the wake of the death of both my father and paternal grandmother, we got pregnant. We didn’t waste any time in sharing the news and joyfully began to make plans and to dream about this child, still hidden in the darkness of the womb. Was it a boy or a girl? What name would we give our child? What talents would he or she have? How would our family change once the baby arrived?

When I miscarried our baby at nine weeks, we were devastated. We had never experienced a grief

so acute and yet so mysterious; we were mourning for a person begotten of our very flesh, but whom we had never met. Our friends and family grieved with us and we were mostly spared the dismissive condolences that so many people hear after a miscarriage: at least you weren’t too far along, at least you know you can get pregnant, etc.

In the weeks that followed, it struck me that while I could not bring myself to say that losing our baby — whom we named Thérèse — had “taught” me something, I was beginning to appreciate more fully the weight of our promise to accept children from God.

We knew that being open to life would mean being open to the changes that children would bring to our routine, open to the trials of family life as well as the many joys. But when we lost Thérèse we experienced what is surely just the beginning of what it means to accept the gift of a child. Together with God we had conceived new life, but that life did not belong to us. We had welcomed her in gratitude, and we could only surrender ourselves to the mercy of God in having to give her back so soon.

Just two months after our miscarriage, we conceived again. Surprised and more than a little unnerved at the prospect, we

recommitted ourselves to what we had promised on our wedding day. With the help of God’s grace we once again consented to open our hearts in the most radical form of hospitality that our Lord asks of us.

The first trimester of that pregnancy was a roller coaster of anxiety and hope and the struggle to trust. Our grief over the loss of Thérèse was still fresh and

yet, ready or not, we were responding once again to God’s gift of a child. Those weeks were some of the most exquisitely difficult of my entire life, as I tried to rejoice over the life within me and yet

feared so much that this gift too would not be ours to hold.

Thanks be to God, that pregnancy led to the birth of a beautiful baby girl, Lucila. Holding our newborn child was an incredible feeling, and it was with visceral gratitude that we received her as “not something owed” to us, “but (as) a gift”

The first trimester of that pregnancy was a roller coaster of anxiety and hope and the struggle to trust.

(CCC 2378). It cemented for me the reality that all life is a gift, including my own, and that we will all return to our Creator one day.

In light of the loss of Thérèse, Lucila is a daily reminder of the graciousness of God. As husband and wife we have committed ourselves to welcoming children, for however long they may be given to us. Ultimately, God is the Father of all of our children, the Giver of all gifts, and the One who extends the audacious invitation to beget new life with Him, in all its beauty and fragility.

Allison Ciraulo is on the staff of the diocesan Office of Family Life and is a freelance writer for Today’s Catholic.

Communicating heart-to-heart

BY LISA EVERETT

Being able to converse with someone, heart-to-heart, is an unmistakable sign of an intimate relationship, whether that someone is a friend, a parent, a spouse or God Himself. The art of learning to converse with God, heart-to-heart, is what is called contemplative prayer, and the four traditional elements of this prayer can not only deepen our dialogue with God, but also enrich our communication and intimacy with our husband or wife. Let's take a brief look at each of these elements and see how it can facilitate our ability to better converse, heart-to-heart, with our beloved.

• Giving praise

All of us appreciate receiving a sincere compliment that comes from the heart — a word of affirmation that recognizes a talent we have, admires something good we have done, or simply acknowledges that our very existence itself is an incredible gift. God, too, appreciates our praise when it comes from the heart. For example, "Wow, Lord, You are awesome! I can't believe how You made that situation work out, especially when so many things were beyond my control." In marriage, praising our spouse in ways that are specific and sincere communicates to him or her that we regard them as an invaluable gift and a continuing source of good in our lives. For example: "Honey, I was amazed at how calm you remained when that person provoked you — I really admire that about you."

• Giving thanks

There is nothing worse than feeling like the good we try to do for someone we love is taken for granted, neither noticed nor appreciated. Imagine how God must feel when we go about our lives without recognizing or thanking Him for the countless blessings, big and small, that He bestows on us all the time! In contrast, think of the simple, sincere words of gratitude that rose from Our Lady's heart as she greeted her cousin Elizabeth, who also had been recently graced with the gift of a child: "He who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name!" In addition to making a habit of thanking God for all the good things He does for us, day in and day out, we also need to acquire an attitude of gratitude towards our spouse, who in spite of human weakness, strives to do good things for us, day in and day out. For example: "Thank you for offering to run that errand for me this afternoon. It really made a difference in how my day went." Giving thanks from the heart to our spouse communicates to him or her that all the ways in which they express their love for us and for others is appreciated.

• Asking for what we need

Although it might seem at times that our prayer consists mainly in asking God to give us (and others) good things, He loves it when we have the confidence and trust of children who know that all they truly need will be given to them by their heavenly Father. For example: "Lord, I think that this job would be ideal for me. Please let the interview today go well. But if you have another plan in mind for me, give me the grace to accept a different path." In marriage, however, it often happens that we are reluctant to verbalize our needs, and instead assume that our spouse should know us well enough and love us selflessly enough to read our minds or pick up on our tone of voice or otherwise figure it out! When we have the humility to ask our spouse for help, we acknowledge that we are a team and that two heads, two hearts and two sets of hands are better than one. For example: "You are much better than I am at organizing things. Would you please give me a hand with this project for half an hour?" When we communicate confidence that our spouse is willing and able to assist us in matters large and small, our sense of being real partners in the great adventure of marriage grows and matures.

• Asking for forgiveness

No matter how much we love God or our spouse, there will be many times, (mostly in small ways hopefully), when we do something we shouldn't have done or said something we shouldn't have said. And what is even more difficult to acknowledge and admit sometimes are all the good things we *fail* to do or to say, the so-called "sins of omission." For example: "Lord, I was not courageous enough to speak the truth just now because I was afraid of what people would think of me. Please forgive me and give me strength the next time an opportunity arises." In the same way, when we realize that we have said or done something offensive to our spouse, or omitted doing or saying what would have been the loving thing, we need to sincerely apologize and humbly ask for forgiveness. For example: "I am sorry that I wasted time on the internet last night instead of helping fold the huge pile of laundry on the couch. Please forgive me and I promise to pitch in next time."

Lisa Everett is co-director of the diocesan Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.



Natural Family Planning:

Living the 'body language' of married love

BY LISA EVERETT

Saint John Paul II devoted a significant part of his pontificate to articulating the profound difference between contraception and natural family planning. "(It) is a difference which is much wider and deeper than is usually thought," he reflected, "one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality." — "Familiaris consortio," 32. In fact, the late Holy Father developed his beautiful "theology of the body" largely as a way to understand more deeply and to explain more positively this essential difference.

What concept of the human person and human sexuality does the pope's "theology of the body" expound? It begins with the belief — echoed in Sacred Scripture, in reason and in the deep recesses of the human heart — that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God. This is so important to reflect on at the outset, because unless we know who God is, we will never know who we are. God is Love, and He lives in Himself a mystery of personal, loving communion that we call the Holy Trinity. In this communion of persons, God the Father is the lover, God the Son is the beloved, and the love between them is so perfect, so real, that it is actually another person — the Holy Spirit. If we are created in the image and likeness of a God who is not an individual but rather, a loving communion of persons, then we resemble God not only because of the rational mind and free will we have as individual men and women — we image God more perfectly and profoundly by living in loving communion with one another.

God created marriage to be the first, and in a sense, the most fundamental form of living out the personal, loving communion that makes us like God. St. John Paul II found in the familiar story of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, an ancient affirmation of this truth that man and woman are made for each and meant to be a gift for

each other. This call to communion is "written" in a special way into human sexuality, into the very maleness and femaleness of the human body, which are literally designed to fit together, making a man and woman capable of becoming "one flesh." As St. John Paul II put it: "(Sexuality) is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul — and it manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love." — "Familiaris consortio," 37.

Sexual intercourse is intended by God to be the most intimate sign of the mutual gift of self that a man and woman make to one another in marriage. In sexual union, a husband and wife say with their bodies in a very private way what they said publicly at the altar on their wedding day: "I accept you completely as the gift from God that you are, and I give myself to you completely in return." Sex is the body language of married love. This mutual gift of self, which is expressed in sexual union, is not meant to end with the couple, but rather, makes them capable of the greatest possible gift: becoming co-creators with God in giving life to a new human person. The communion of love between a husband and wife is meant to mirror the love that exists between the Father and the Son, a love that is literally "personified" in the Holy Spirit. In a similar way, through the privilege of procreation, God enables the love between a husband and wife to become "personified" in the gift of their child, who is literally the two of them in one flesh, a living reflection of their love and a permanent sign of their unity. And what is more, this new human being bears not only the image and likeness of his or her parents, but above all, the image and likeness of God.

So we see that the love-giving and life-giving meanings of sexual union are intimately linked, like two sides of the same coin, because they mirror the inner life of God who is love. This beautiful vision is the basis of all of the moral norms, which surround the gift of sexuality, including the norm that requires that every act of sexual

love in marriage remain open to the transmission of life. Because God has inscribed in sexual intercourse an inseparable connection between its love-giving capacity and its life-giving capacity, married couples must respect the integrity of this act whenever they choose to engage in it.

How, precisely, are contraception and sterilization irreconcilable with this concept of the human person and human sexuality? In essence, contraception and sterilization contradict the meaning of sex as an expression of total self-giving. If I withhold my fertility from my spouse, which is an integral part of my identity as a man or woman, I am not giving myself totally in the very act which is supposed to express most profoundly my complete gift of self. Here is how Pope John Paul II explained it:

"When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings (love-giving and life-giving) that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as 'arbiters' of the divine plan and they 'manipulate' and degrade human sexuality — and with it themselves and their married partner — by altering its value of 'total' self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total, reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality."

The Catholic Church promotes natural family planning (NFP) because it completely corresponds with God's design for human sexuality, respecting the "body language" of married love and the inseparable link between its love-giving and life-giving purposes. NFP is a scientifically based method of regulating conception based on observing and interpreting the "sign language," so to speak, that a woman's body naturally provides,

which indicates whether she is fertile or infertile on any given day. NFP allows a couple to prayerfully discern on a periodic basis whether or not God is calling them to conceive a child and then to identify the days on which conception is possible should they desire to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. International studies confirm that when spouses are properly instructed and follow the rules carefully, NFP can have an effectiveness rate of 98-99 percent. Couples are also taught how the practice of exclusive, extended breast-feeding provides a significant period of infertility after the birth of a child. This kind of breast-feeding is, in fact, the most basic form of NFP because it can have the effect of naturally spacing the births of children over the course of a woman's

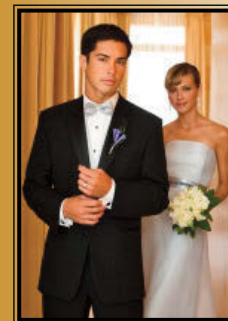
childbearing years. Many couples find that the mutual respect, regular communication and shared responsibility that the practice of NFP requires strengthens their relationship with one other. Most importantly, couples who use NFP have the assurance that they are acting as faithful stewards of God's gifts of sexuality and fertility.

For information on a Natural Family Planning class near you, contact the diocesan Office of Family Life at 574-234-0687 or visit <http://www.diocesefwsb.org/Natural-Family-Planning>.

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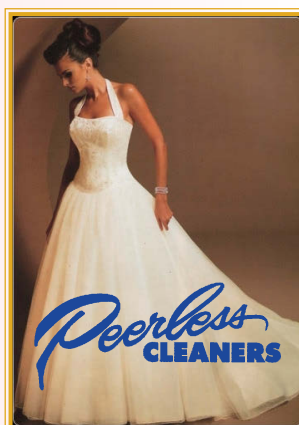
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FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED

What is the symbolism of the rings?

Office of Worship: As proclaimed by the bride and groom within the actual Marriage rite, the rings symbolize “love and fidelity.” Gold bands call to mind permanence, purity and beauty within the sacramental union. Moreover, they are given from one spouse to another, attesting to the total gift of self in matrimony.

Whatever happened to the unity candle?

Office of Worship: Beyond the fact that they are not part of the Marriage rites, “unity candles” are inappropriate for wedding Masses because they draw the connection and focus away from the true source and symbol of unity, the Holy Eucharist, from which the sacrament of Marriage flows. The vows and the declaration of consent, coupled with the sacramentals that are the rings, are what publicly and powerfully convey the real union of the spouses in a Catholic wedding. The “unity candle” distracts from this reality. Also, lighting an extra candle that gets blown out at the end of Mass is really not the best symbol of covenantal permanence.

Can we have “our song” in the wedding? It’s a pop song.

Office of Worship: The wedding is a sacred event, and the music must reflect this fact. Secular music does not belong before, during, or after the rite within the sacred place of the church. Favorite secular or popular songs of the couple belong at the reception or at another time during the wedding festivities that is not associated with the liturgy itself.

Should the witnesses be Catholic, at least the best man and maid of honor?

Office of Worship: Strictly speaking, while it would probably be preferable to have Catholic witnesses, the witnesses function primarily to attest that the Marriage was celebrated. Therefore, they need not be Catholic. However, the authorized witness who officiates the liturgy must be a priest or deacon.

My fiancé is not Catholic. Should we have a Mass?

Office of Worship: In order for a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic, permission first must be obtained from the bishop, via the vicar general. Then, a decision on whether or not to have a Nuptial Mass needs to be made in consultation with the pastor or priest involved in the planning process. It is sometimes the case that it would be better to highlight the unity of the couple rather than the differences. If the couple had

a Mass, one partner would not be able to receive the Holy Eucharist since he or she would not be Catholic (and it is also likely that most of the non-Catholic’s family would not be Catholic). Therefore, it might sometimes be sensible for the couple to have the Rite of Marriage outside of Mass.

If the situation involves a Catholic marrying a non-Baptized person, a special dispensation is needed from the diocese, and it would not be possible to celebrate a Nuptial Mass.

My fiancé is not Catholic and wants to marry in her church? How would the Church recognize the Marriage? What can we do for the Church to recognize the sacramentality of the Marriage?

Office of Worship: In order to ensure validity in this situation, the diocese, through the bishop’s authority, must give permission to marry a non-Catholic and also a dispensation to marry in a non-Catholic ceremony. For any such Marriage questions, couples should consult the pastor.

Can my non-Catholic friend proclaim the Scripture we choose?

Office of Worship: A lector at a Mass should be a person in full communion with the Catholic Church, a person who is serious about the practice of their faith, and a person who is willing to undergo appropriate preparation for the role. Proclaiming the Scriptures or reading the intercessions is not a role a non-Catholic can take in the Mass, unless the diocesan bishop specifically grants an extraordinary exception to a non-Catholic Christian. However, if the Marriage rites are taking place outside Mass, then there would not be any problem with a baptized non-Catholic doing the readings.

I have children from a previous relationship, how or should they participate?

Office of Worship: Depending upon the age of the children, they could serve as members of the bridal party (bridesmaid, groomsman, flower girl, ring bearer). Also, if a child is of the appropriate age, is a practicing Catholic, and has received the appropriate training, he or she could proclaim a Scripture reading during Mass. Another option is to act as one of the giftbearers.

I need the whole morning to decorate the church. Father said we can’t decorate to that extent. Why?

Office of Worship: While reasonable decoration is allowed for festive liturgical events, there are several reasons why one should not completely

revamp the entire church and sanctuary.

First, the proper décor for the particular liturgical season is a factor. Some seasons require that liturgies refrain from too much fanfare and display (see the next question about Advent and Lenten weddings).

Also, having the sanctuary redecorated could conflict with the decorations planned for other weddings or liturgies to be held in the church on the same day.

Furthermore, additional decorations should not distract from the primary focus, which is the divine liturgy itself. The sanctuary is the place where the altar stands, where the word of God is proclaimed and where priests and deacons exercise their office. The church, after all, is the house of God, and it has a dignity and purpose of its own — a purpose that lends context to the celebration of Holy Matrimony, not the other way around. The beautification of the church should serve this purpose, and pastors always work to ensure this. The reception after the wedding would be the appropriate location for more whimsical and creative decoration.

Is getting married during Lent or Advent discouraged by the Church?

Office of Worship: While Catholics are allowed to marry during Advent and Lent, they are not necessarily the best opportunities for overly festive liturgical celebrations. Particularly in Lent, the decorations and music during liturgies should correspond to the more austere nature of the season, which is characterized by penitence and restraint in preparation for the Sacred Triduum. For example, except for certain high feast days in Lent, the altar is not allowed to have floral decoration. Moderate floral decoration is prescribed for Advent as well.

How does the new Mass translation affect weddings?

Office of Worship: When the new Roman Missal was implemented in November of 2011, the texts of our Mass prayers were updated to be truer to the Latin original. Thus, they are richer, more eloquent, and often contain more theological nuance and beauty. We can hear this in the prayers of the wedding Mass, including the Nuptial Blessing. In addition, the new Missal more explicitly acknowledges the intrinsic festive nature of a Marriage by prescribing that the penitential act be omitted and the Gloria always sung on those days in which the actual ritual Mass for Marriage can be used.

I am close to a pastor from my youth. Could he celebrate the Marriage rite?

Office of Worship: Some parishes may allow outside priests to officiate. However, couples should speak to the parish pastor about such things. Also, for any liturgical event, a priest brought in from outside the diocese must officially register with the diocese prior to the event.

Do Catholics hold Masses in parks, state parks, etc.?

Office of Worship: The norm in Catholic Marriages should take place in a church is the house of God, and where the Eucharistic liturgy is celebrated for the Christian community. It is up to this diocese to grant outdoor ex-

Who should be paid a fee for the Mass, and how is it determined?

Office of Worship: It is a long-standing tradition to give a gift to the priest or deacon who celebrates a wedding or another sacrament (such as a Baptism). However, the diocese has a prescribed fee, and there is no obligation to pay an amount. The priest or deacon may accept a gift given to him personally. Check with your parish would go to the church.

For wedding liturgies, it is a tradition to provide some sort of musicians such as the organist, cantor, and sometimes for a choir, if they are assembled for the event). These fees vary from parish to parish, so please inquire with your parish about the practice is at your church.

Does the Church ever approve the use of artificial birth control?

Office of Family Life: The Church teaches that every act of sexual love must be open to the possibility of new life. This is why the Church has designed sex with both a life-giving purpose, and when a couple chooses to engage in sex, they must accept the possibility of God designed it. The only time the Church approves of artificial birth control is when a woman has been raped, and the use of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg. In this situation, because the woman is not free to choose to engage in sex, she is allowed to defend herself from a possible pregnancy. However, if fertilization has already occurred, nothing may be done to prevent the development of the newly conceived life. In addition, sometimes a physician may prescribe artificial hormones such as those used for the purpose of birth control but which have an underlying condition in the body. The Church does not approve of the use of these artificial hormones.

Does the Church approve of methods of family planning for married couples?

Office of Family Life: The Church teaches that every act of sexual love must be open to the possibility of new life. This is why the Church has designed sex with both a life-giving purpose, and when a couple chooses to engage in sex, they must accept the possibility of God designed it. The only time the Church approves of artificial birth control is when a woman has been raped, and the use of preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg. In this situation, because the woman is not free to choose to engage in sex, she is allowed to defend herself from a possible pregnancy. However, if fertilization has already occurred, nothing may be done to prevent the development of the newly conceived life. In addition, sometimes a physician may prescribe artificial hormones such as those used for the purpose of birth control but which have an underlying condition in the body. The Church does not approve of the use of these artificial hormones.

QUESTIONS

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body. The presence or absence of these signs allow couples to identify the days when conception is most likely should they desire to achieve a pregnancy, or to refrain from sexual relations on those days when conception is possible should they desire to avoid a pregnancy. International studies have confirmed that when used to avoid pregnancy, NFP can have an effectiveness rate of 98-99 percent.

Are engaged couples required to take natural family planning classes?

Office of Family Life: Those marrying in our diocese are required to attend a day-long Conference for Engaged Couples, which includes an overview of natural family planning. While it is not required, engaged couples are strongly encouraged to take a complete natural family planning class series, which is offered in either English or Spanish throughout the diocese. For a complete schedule of diocesan NFP classes, go to www.diocesefwsb.org/Natural-Family-Planning. Also listed on this website is the contact information for other organizations that offer natural family planning classes in this diocese.

Are there other recommended resources on these issues?

Office of Family Life: The diocesan Office of Family Life has produced a DVD called "Beginning and End of Life Issues: Seeking Divine Wisdom" and a booklet called "Faith and Fertility: What the Church Teaches and Why," which present the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood, contraception and infertility. Both are available through the Cathedral Bookstore in Fort Wayne, 260-422-4611.

The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, "Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan," is also a very good resource on these issues. It is available at www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/index.cfm.



JACOBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Diocesan online survey on marriage and family generated interesting results

BY FRED EVERETT

As many will recall, at the end of 2013, the diocese, with the assistance of the Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, conducted an online survey in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family held last October. Over less than a three-week period, we received more than 1,700 responses. The great majority was from Catholics who attend Mass weekly, but around 200 were from those who go to Mass less frequently. The results of that survey were helpful to us as we prepared a report for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as well as the Holy See.

What was particularly helpful was that we found that among those Catholics who attend Mass weekly, the more that they are familiar with the Church's teachings, the more supportive they are of them.

For example, for those weekly attenders who are very familiar with the Church's teachings on marriage and family, almost 80 percent answered that they were very supportive of those teachings. Only about 2 percent answered that they were not at all supportive. Among those who were only somewhat or a little familiar, strong support ran about 60 percent and 45 percent respectively. In short, there was a high correlation between familiarity and support among weekly attenders.

The story is a bit more complex with those Catholics who do not attend Mass weekly. Their level of support for Church teachings is, in general, lower than the weekly attenders. However, a correlation continues to exist between familiarity and support among the non-weekly attenders. Interestingly, for those claiming familiarity there was also a greater degree of non-support. In other words, there is a greater level of polarization in this group with fewer in the middle. This is particularly true with respect to the issues of contraception and divorce/remarriage.

In our diocesan survey, many individuals expressed difficulties in putting the Church's teachings into practice. These difficulties include dealing with periods of extended abstinence during the practice of natural family planning (NFP), feeling alone and isolated in living a counter-cultural lifestyle with little tangible support from others, or feeling strong sympathy for family members or other loved ones who have a homosexual orientation or who are divorced and remarried outside of the Church.

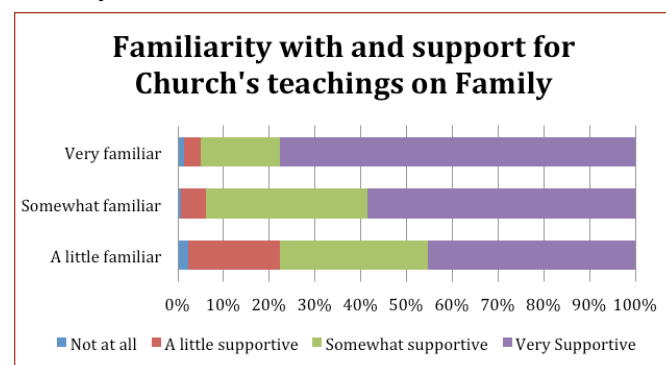
One area where there was relatively strongly shared support by both groups was that regarding the teaching that marriage is between one man and one woman. Among those who attend Mass weekly and are very familiar with this teaching, strong support approaches 80 percent.

Unlike the issues of contraception and divorce/remarriage, we did not find the same polarization on the issue of same-sex marriage among those who do not attend weekly. In other words, increased familiarity with the Church's teachings against same sex marriage generally was associated with greater support of it, though at significantly lower levels. This finding can be a very helpful insight pastorally in that it indicates that there is an openness to the Church's teachings if explained carefully and charitably. In other words, there would appear to be less resistance to this teaching and less potential to cause polarization if presented well.

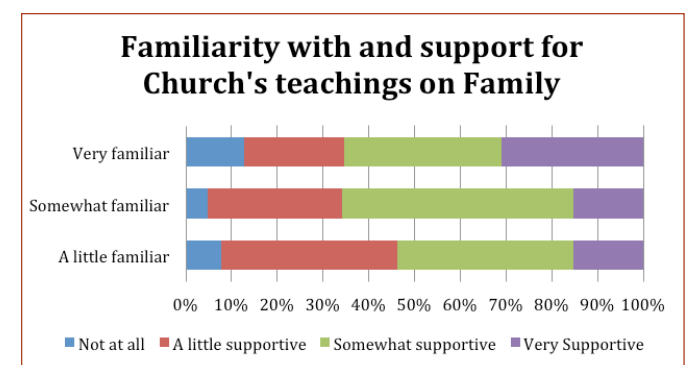
Given the opportunity to reflect upon the results of this survey, it is my conviction that well-trained Christian married couples need to be among the primary agents of the New Evangelization. What has been lacking is an approach that helps Christian couples to mentor each other in a way that integrates the Church's vision of marriage and family with the difficulties of living this vision in our secularized culture today. Couples must be helped and encouraged to develop the necessary habits and virtues that will make the flourishing of marriage and family life possible.

Fred Everett is co-director of the diocesan Office of Family Life for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

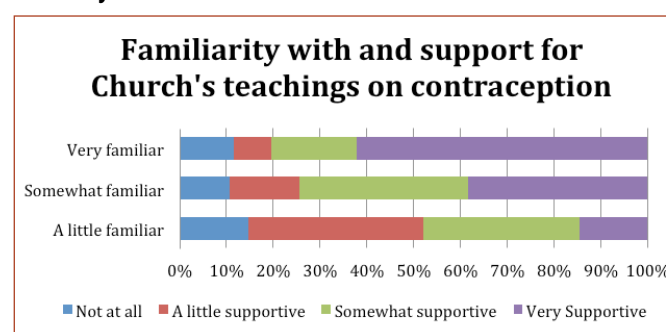
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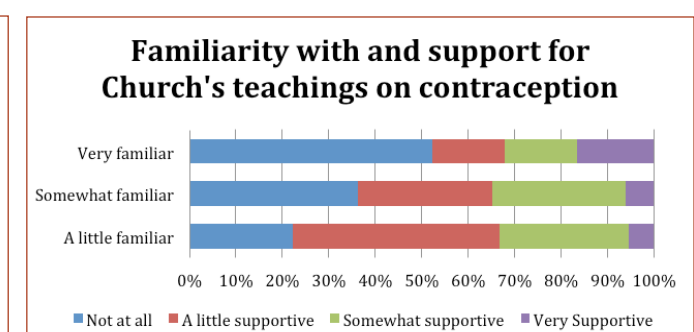
Non-weekly attenders :



Weekly Mass attenders:



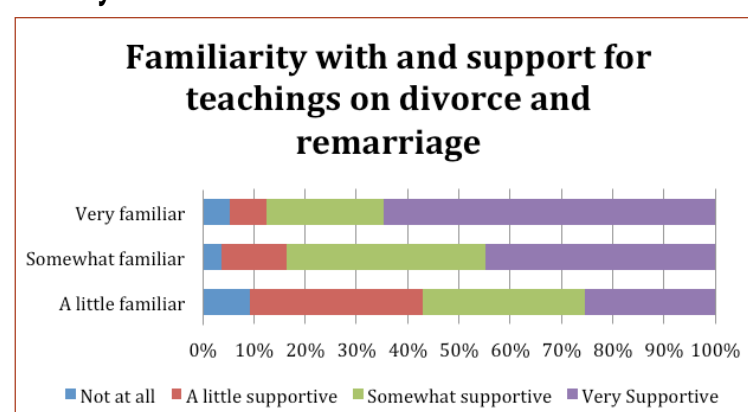
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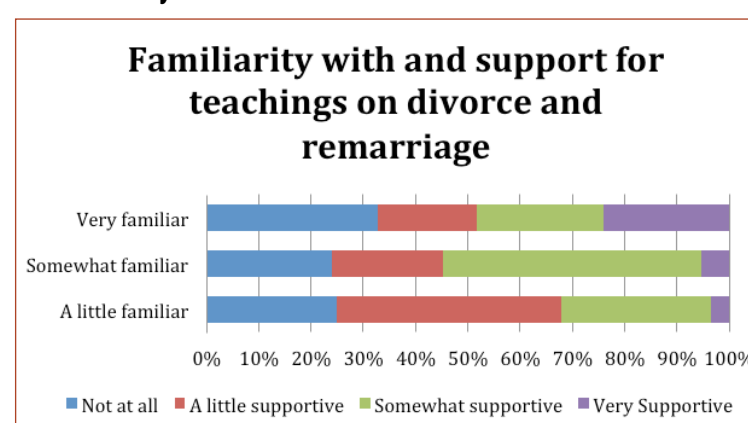
With regard to the Church's teaching on contraception, more than 60 percent of Catholics who attend Mass weekly and are very familiar with the Church's teaching on family planning strongly support this teaching. Many of them have been exposed to St. John Paul II's theology of the body and have grown in appreciation of the gift of sexuality. However, as many who shared their experiences on the survey showed, even among those who support this teaching, many still struggle to live it faithfully. In addition, as familiarity with the teaching falls, support for it falls significantly.

Notice that among those very familiar with the Church's teachings, about a third are not at all supportive. Even among weekly attenders, strong support only reaches about two-thirds.

Weekly Mass attenders:



Non-weekly attenders :



The issue of divorce and remarriage remains a very contentious issue. In the survey, this issue was only second to the issue of contraception in the opposition voiced by many, though particularly those who did not attend Mass weekly. Many cannot understand why, as it seems to them, the Church will not give people a second chance at happiness or why the annulment process should be so cumbersome, intrusive or corrupt in granting annulments to the wealthy. The study found that for those who actually knew someone who had been divorced or had been involved in the annulment process, their views tended to be much more critical and non-supportive of the Church's position.

A journey in the hands of the Lord: Pope Francis on the Family

BY JOHN SIKORSKI

In Manila, Pope Francis recently alluded to the love of newlyweds: “How many difficulties in married life are resolved ... when we stop a moment to think of our spouse, and we dream about the goodness present in the good things all around us. Do not ever stop being newlyweds!” The wedding day, however, is the beginning of a family, called to a lifelong journey of love.

For Pope Francis, the Christian family is a *community* founded upon the love of a man and woman sharing in Christ’s love. Until their wedding day, a husband and wife have only been two individuals, who are now transformed by grace into a community centered upon Christ. This new community will only thrive to the degree that it remembers that Christ is its center.

In his “Letter to Families,” Pope Francis writes that Christ “is the inexhaustible font of that love, which overcomes every occasion of self-absorption, solitude and sadness.” In a world where there is much anger, frustration, impatience and self-absorption, the pope reminds families that daily faithfulness to their vocation in Christ will help them to become communities of patient joy. “The basis of this deep joy is the presence of God ... in the family and His love, which is welcoming, merciful and respectful towards all.”

The Christian family is thus a *foundation*, which forms our history, identity and society. The new community of Christ’s peace and joy is a cornerstone for building up the past, present and future generations. In a “throw-away culture” where 1.5 million persons live in nursing homes in our country, all but conveniently sequestered from those whose efficiency might be hampered by their presence, Pope Francis reminds us all to remember the elderly. It was Simeon and Anna, these two elderly prophets, who announced Jesus as the savior to the nations, and saw in Him the

fulfillment of the hopes of Israel. Those of us who are young can easily forget the great gift of grandparents and the older generations, without whom we would not be who we are.

The family, which respects all generations, from the unborn to the elderly, forms a foundation for culture and society. The ways in which we learn, teach, pray and care for one another; our recreation, consumption, spending and waste in the family are then brought to society, and give rise to either solidarity or selfishness, peace or conflict, justice or inequality. In an age of globalization with the proliferation of a consumer culture, which “makes it much more difficult to develop stable bonds between people,” Pope Francis presses the ever important need of the family to create “interpersonal relationships ... and a relationship with God, where authentic communion that welcomes everyone equally can grow.”

For Pope Francis, the family is thus a *place* for encountering difficulties and sufferings, and an opportunity for an encounter with Christ in them, through daily acts of devotion and faithfulness. “The trials, sacrifices and crises of couples as well as of the family as a whole represent pathways for growth in goodness, truth and beauty,” reminds Pope Francis. Speaking to engaged couples, Pope Francis reflects that marriage is an “everyday task ... a craftsman’s task, a goldsmith’s work, because the husband has the duty of making the wife more of a woman and the wife has the duty of making the husband more of a man. ... And this you do together.”

In a place that welcomes the other in spite of failures, mistakes and personal quirks, a person learns welcome and respect, marked by the mercy, tenderness, reconciliation and forgiveness of Christ.

Unlike our predominant approach to education, focused on useful outcomes, efficient results and technical skills, the family provides another kind of education: a *school* formation in what it means to be human as

well as for mission. In “Lumen Fidei,” Pope Francis makes a beautiful analogy between the growth of faith in the Church and the growth of virtues in a family. We are not sure of faith in Christ because we have come to certain conclusions as isolated individuals; rather, we are sure of the truths of our faith because we are immersed in the life of Christ, handed on to us “through an unbroken chain of witnesses” who help us to come to know the face of Jesus. (38). In the same way, our families hand on values to us, which we receive and are then called to hand on to our children, since we all “come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others.”

The wedding day of a couple is thus the beginning of a journey. Where are they going? What will they bring on the journey? Through joy, sadness, sickness and health, they are recipients of a wealth of wisdom, faith and grace, and are called to pass on the faith and virtues to their children and the whole community. They become a “privileged place for evangelization and the living transmission of the faith.”

Perhaps it would do us all well to think of our own answers to Pope Francis’ questions from a recent homily: “How do we keep our faith as a family? Do we keep it for ourselves ... as a personal treasure like a bank account, or are we able to share it by our witness, by our acceptance of others, by our openness? We all know that ... young families are often ‘racing’ from one place to another. ... But did you ever think that this ‘racing’ could also be the race of faith?”

John Sikorski works at the diocesan Office of Family Life.



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JACOBSON PHOTOGRAPHY

'For Your Marriage' website offers resources for couples of all faiths

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Putting a modern image on traditional values, the U.S. Catholic bishops launched a website designed to promote healthy marriages. The website, which is located on the Internet at www.foryourmarriage.org, can aid couples of all faiths. With everything from daily marriage tips to statistics on divorce and cohabitation, this site is an up-to-date resource.

The For Your Marriage website offers resources for everyone, including engaged and married couples, and facts about Catholic marriage. The website is designed for a wide and varied audience and is part of larger campaign, which includes television public service messages, which can be viewed on the site.

The site offers daily marriage tips that suggest simple ways to cultivate a healthy marriage. A link on the home page also gives couples a tool to find Catholic marriage information locally. A monthly marriage quiz can serve as a conversation starter on sensitive issues.

Information on conflict resolution, communication and financial concerns is posted throughout the

website. Topics such as intimacy and parenting also are featured. Visitors also can view stories and advice from married couples.

"The Internet has become a crucial means for evangelizing, especially among younger people," said Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, of Louisville, Kentucky, and the president of the U.S. bishops' conference. "We hope youth especially will find inspiration and hope at the stroke of a key."

The contemporary design of the For Your Marriage website has versatility and accessibility to enable the Internet to be a medium for evangelization and education.

The For Your Marriage website is part of a multiyear National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage. The website and the entire campaign promote the simple exhortation to do something for your marriage.

The For Your Marriage website, and the TV and radio spots are funded by the U.S. bishops' Catholic Communication Campaign, which collects money in parishes nationwide to support Church media efforts.

Marriage licensing rules and regulations

BY KAY COZAD

Preparation for marriage requires an intimate look at spiritual and relational desires as well as the logistics of the wedding itself. Engagement classes may assist with relational questions and a wedding planner is the perfect source for the details of that special day. And one small detail that must not be overlooked is legalizing the marriage with a license.

Here are some important facts about applying for a marriage license

- Apply for a marriage license in the county of residence at the county clerk's office or if from out-of-state, apply in the county in which the wedding will take

place. The county clerk's office is usually located in the county probate or circuit court.

- A valid driver's license or picture identification card showing current address and date of birth is required.

- Some counties may require a certified copy of a birth certificate if applicant is under 30.

- The cost is \$18 for in-state residents and \$60 for out-of-state residents. **IMPORTANT:** Credit and debit cards are NOT accepted.

- Applicant must be 18 years or older to apply without parental consent. Under 18 must have a parent or legal guardian present and a birth certificate may be required. Under 16 requires a court order.

- License is valid for 60 days with no waiting period to marry after issued.

- License is valid statewide.

- Widowed or divorced applicants must provide dates of death or divorce. Some counties require copies of death certificate or divorce decree.

Other little known marriage licensing facts in the state of Indiana include: cousins may marry if both applicants are over 65 years old, and proxy and common law marriages are forbidden.

A spokesperson from the Allen County Recorder's Office encourages couples to apply for the license together within a month of the wedding date to ensure the license does not expire before the wedding date. And finally, the officiating clergyman must sign the marriage license on the wedding day prior to sending it to the proper government agency for validation.

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What is appropriate wedding attire for church?

BY LISA EVERETT

Every bride wants to look beautiful on her wedding day, and every bridesmaid hopes to wear a dress that is both fashionable and flattering. Beauty, after all, is one of the attributes of God, and women in a special way bear witness to the power of beauty to attract our attention. But part of the allure of beauty lies not only in what it reveals, but also in what it conceals, and this is where the meaning of modesty comes in.

Consider this beautiful description from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. ... Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love.” — Nos. 2521-2522.

In a nutshell, then, modesty means dressing in a way that is attractive but does not draw attention to one’s sex appeal or arouse sexual desire in another person.

When planning a wedding, it is important to take into consideration the fact that many bridal fashions today are much more revealing than in the past, and are not always appropriate attire for Church, which is a holy place — the house of God. In this regard, many Catholic churches take their cue from the dress code that is strictly enforced at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, which specifies that clothing should cover the shoulders and knees for both men and women.

If we apply this standard to wedding attire, it means no plunging necklines or dresses that fall way above the knee. And while the majority of wedding gowns and bridesmaids’ dresses marketed today are strapless, it is possible to find some that are not, and some local retail bridal shops are able to add sleeves or wider straps to any of their offerings.

An alternative is to accessorize with an attractive wedding bolero, shrug, shawl or jacket, which are all over websites like Etsy.

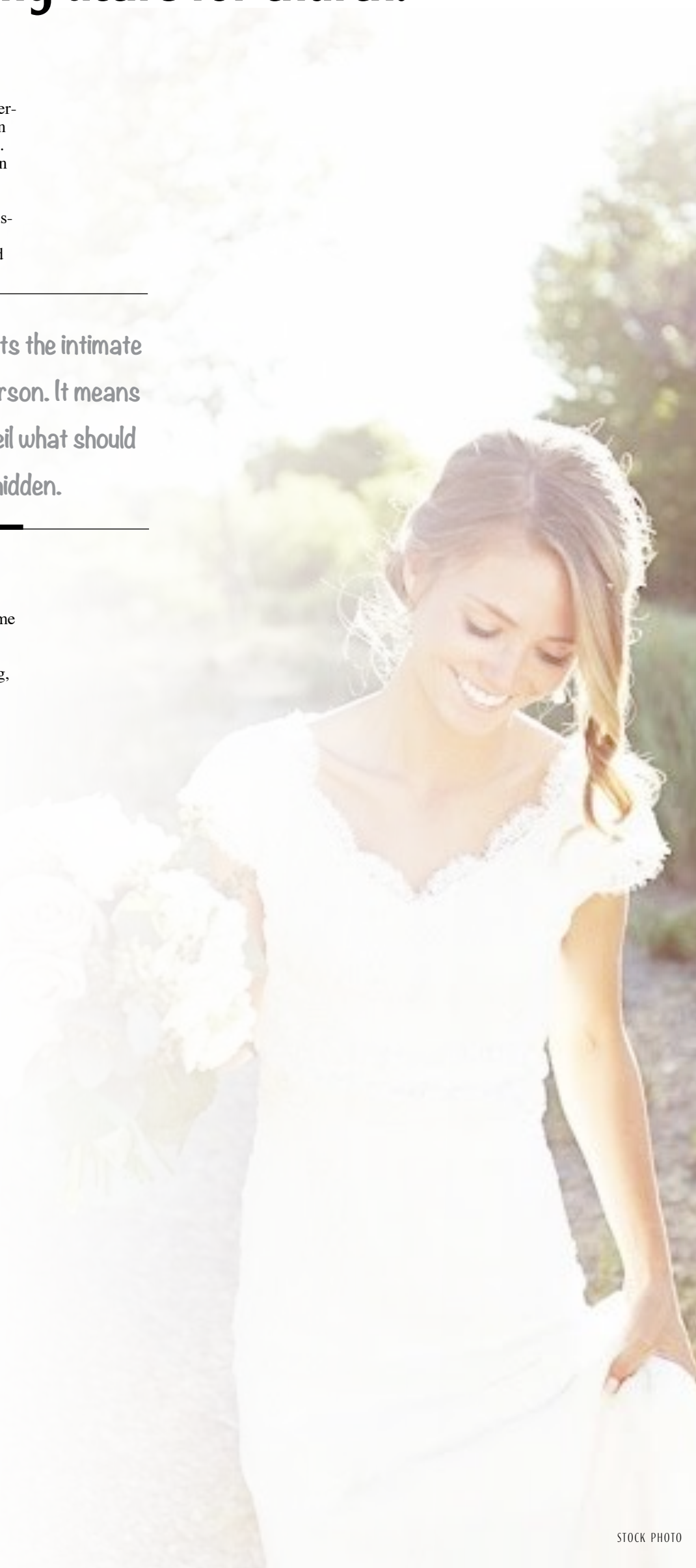
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