



Dakota Catholic Action

Special Edition FEBRUARY 2026



**THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE
FREE, TOTAL, FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL**

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8 things you can do for your spouse today

TODAY (AND EVERY DAY)



Say something kind

Do something kind

Make their life easier

Give purposeful time - It is easy to fall into the trap of turning to our phones the moment we have any free time. Our escape into technology can be enjoyable, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to do so without neglecting our spouse. Make time for your spouse today by putting your phone away and giving them your full attention.

Be vulnerable - Without vulnerability, there can be little intimacy between you and your spouse. Intimacy is incredibly important to the health of a marriage. Being vulnerable can be uncomfortable, so it is something that we often must deliberately choose to do.

Pray for your spouse - Praying for your spouse is vital and needs to be done often. Praying for them is a special way to express your love for them. Knowing that your spouse is praying for you is a comforting feeling because you know they are entrusting you and your marriage to the Lord. Ask your spouse how you can pray for them and then entrust them and their needs to God.

Fast for your spouse - Praying is so beneficial in marriage, and fasting for your spouse elevates your prayer. Marriage requires sacrifice from both spouses by its very nature. Fasting from something good in your life and the subsequent suffering is a beautiful example of sacrificial love. Fast from something good in your life and offer the suffering to God for the benefit of your spouse, even if they don't know you are fasting for them.

Pray and fast WITH your spouse - The only thing you can do for your spouse that is better than praying and fasting for them is praying and fasting with them. Jesus should be at the center of every marriage, and the journey a couple is on should always have the goal of growing closer to Christ. Leading our spouses to Christ is our duty as husbands and wives. We want to grow closer to God as individuals and as a couple. Praying and fasting together is a wonderful way of doing that.

Source: <https://catholic-link.org/catholic-spouse-marriage-tips/>

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Photo by Ben Gumeringer Photography.



Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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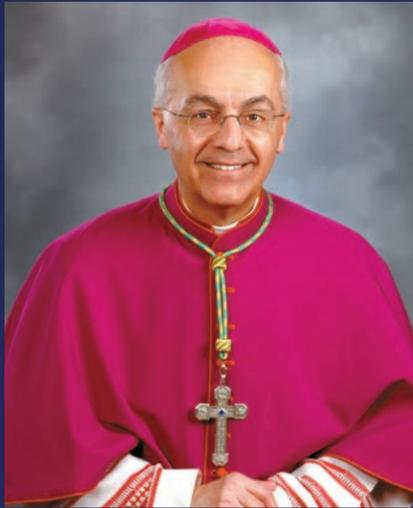
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FROM THE BISHOP

Introducing you to our matrimony magazine

Bishop David D. Kagan

Welcome to the Bismarck Diocese's newest publication, *The Sacrament of Marriage: Free, Total, Faithful and Fruitful*. It represents much prayer, discussion and hard work on the part of so many of our devoted parish and diocesan members, all with long and fruitful experience in preparing others for the life-changing vocation of marriage and of equal importance, living married life with the abundant graces the Lord gives them.

Today, we are all aware of the attempts to denigrate and deny the essential place of the marriage of one man and one woman committed to each other for as long as they live. We are all aware of how the culture denies the importance of children in marriage as well as the essential and irreplaceable role of a father and mother to the healthy growth and development of children. In other words, true marriage is under attack from many quarters and we, as Catholics faithful to our vocations, cannot allow these attacks to win.

This special edition focusing on the sacrament of marriage is something I wholeheartedly endorse and urge all Catholics and others of good will to read and use to strengthen marriages, to encourage our young people to look upon marriage not as a mere convenience but as a gift from Almighty God to them and the state in life in which God wants them to save their souls, the souls of their spouses and the souls of their children. It is my fervent hope and prayer that this will serve all of us well. That this will inspire a renewed understanding and appreciation of true marriage, and that strengthened by the worthy reception of the sacraments, married couples will love each other with the love our good and merciful Lord continues to love them.

Please read this new publication and take joy in its content and through that joy, live the married life in Christ to the full! †

OFFICE OF FAMILY MINISTRY AND RESPECT LIFE

The sacrament of matrimony:
A sacred gift from God



Photo by Lauren Wilkens.

The sacrament of matrimony was instituted by God as a sacred covenant that gives a man and a woman the grace to love one another as Christ loves His Church, and is ordered toward a love that is free, total, faithful and fruitful.

Within these pages, you will find writings that will explain the marriage covenant and provide guidelines on living out a sacramental marriage as God intended. May God bless you as you read this *Dakota Catholic Action* special matrimony edition. †

Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life
Bismarck Diocese



PRAYER IN DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE



God our Father, we give You thanks for the gift of marriage: the bond of life and love, and the font of the family.

The love of husband and wife enriches Your Church with children, fills the world with a multitude of spiritual fruitfulness and service, and is the sign of the love of Your Son, Jesus Christ, for His Church.

The grace of Jesus flowed forth at Cana at the request of the Blessed Mother. May Your Son, through the intercession of Mary, pour out upon us a new measure of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as we join with all people of good will to promote and protect the unique beauty of marriage.

May Your Holy Spirit enlighten our society to treasure the heroic love of husband and wife, and guide our leaders to sustain and protect the singular place of mothers and fathers in the lives of their children.

Father, we ask that our prayers be joined to those of the Virgin Mary, that Your Word may transform our service so as to safeguard the incomparable splendor of marriage. We ask all these things through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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What does the sacrament of matrimony offer to the couple?

Fr. Jacob Degele | Diocesan Priest

Those familiar with the 1987 comedy *The Princess Bride* will understand the reference I am making when I say, “Mawiage... mawiage is what bwings us togevuh today.” This is a reference to that classic scene between Prince Humperdinck and his bride, Buttercup, at their wedding, which is being officiated on behalf of the church by actor Peter Cook. From the clergyman’s speech impediment to his imposing sideburns, this scene is filled with humorous satire. For actual clergy and churchmen, however, this scene makes us cringe. Underlying this scene, I would argue, is a mentality which reduces “marriage in the church” to just a formality. In other words, the only reason a couple must come to a church for their wedding is because it is required, and not because of its sacramental magnitude.

For many couples preparing for marriage today, the sacramental part of matrimony is, at best, given a head-nod. The party planning and guestlist-making aspects tend to preoccupy and distract the hearts of the bride and groom. They can become forgetful or ignorant of God’s grace, which desires to enter and transform the lifelong covenant for which they are preparing.

For couples who have attempted marriage outside of the Church, but later seek marriage in the Church, such a faulty understanding of the marriage ceremony tends to reveal an innocent, yet inaccurate, request in their initial conversation with the priest. One might say, “Father, we would like to have our marriage blessed.” In this instance, the priest *will not be blessing* the previously made vows. Rather, he will be witnessing those vows *for*

the first time on behalf of Our Lord and His Church. In other words, the couple sitting in father’s office, is not actually married.

So, what difference does it make to get married in the presence of the Church’s minister in the context of the sacramental liturgy of Holy Matrimony? Is it a mere formality or something beyond?

The Catholic Church has long believed and taught that Our Lord instituted seven sacraments for His Church, those instrumental means by which He might make her holy in preparation to be made His glorious bride in paradise (cf. Ephesians 5:25-27). They are the channels of grace through which Christ makes us sharers in His Paschal Mystery and even in His own divine life. Holy Matrimony is one of those seven sacraments instituted by Christ. It is unique, however, because matrimony already existed as a secular reality long before Our Lord’s Incarnation, beginning with our first parents Adam and Eve. By elevating this already existing establishment to the level of a sacrament, Christ invites the bride and groom to partake of the graces they need to be the mirroring image of His love for His Bride, the Church. This means that for those who are members of His Church, the sacrament of marriage became the obligatory means of contracting marriage. Generally speaking, any attempt to contract marriage outside of the guidelines set forth by the authority Christ has given to the Church is considered invalid, *and is not a marriage.*

At this point, one might be inclined to object that this seems to be an arbitrary move on the part of the Church towards Catholics. Why aren’t our Protestant brothers and sisters obliged to do this as well? And

“Our Lord desires to give abundant graces to those who ask for them (cf. Matthew 7:7-11), especially to those couples striving for holiness in the covenant of holy matrimony. The Lord loves the goodness of marriage and the joy that it can bring to His people.”

who is the Church to tell me that I am not actually married to my spouse? These are genuine questions and objections that I have heard as a priest. A simple response is that God has always been the founder or architect of the marriage bond. It has always been one of His many gifts to mankind. So, for God to take on flesh in the Incarnation and then elevate to a sacrament something which already belongs to Him should not be a source of shock for us. A more complex response is that during the Protestant Reformations unleashed by Martin Luther, Luther rejected marriage as a sacrament instituted by Christ. For Luther, marriage was undoubtedly a noble contract subject to God's law, but it was no longer to be considered an instrument and sign of God's grace. Luther undoubtedly acknowledged God's favor upon the marriage contract, but faithfully living out the marriage bond was not a sacramental means of God's grace helping the couple on the path to salvation. Thus, for much of our Protestant brethren, a marriage can be contracted in a church, on a beach or in a courthouse and still be considered a marriage.

Another question sometimes arises, especially in the context of the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) or during the Church's annulment process, is why the Church acknowledges as a sacrament those marriages contracted between two Protestant parties. After all, if the Protestant theology does not recognize it as a sacrament, why does the Catholic Church? Interestingly, in her definition of the sacrament of marriage, the Church does not restrict the reception of this sacrament to baptized Catholics, but rather *the baptized*. The Code of Canon Law states that, "a valid matrimonial contract cannot exist between the baptized without it being by that fact a sacrament." For this reason, although Luther may have rejected it as a sacrament, the Catholic Church upholds the sacramental marriage bond between two Protestants.

So, what does the sacrament of matrimony offer to the couple? Like each of the seven sacraments, there are particular graces which accompany the marriage bond of a sacramentally-married couple. The purpose of those graces is to strengthen and

make fruitful those goods of marriage which have traditionally been upheld—indissolubility, fidelity and the procreation and education of children. While the bond of marriage, in and of itself, demands and suggests these three goods, the sacramental graces received in the sacrament of matrimony help the couple to fulfill the responsibilities and duties associated with these goods. And as many married couples would probably agree, if there was a possibility of receiving divine grace from God to assist with these sublime responsibilities, why would a person shy away from them or reject them? The Catechism quotes Tertullian's statement on this tremendous gift: How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit" (CCC 1642).

Our Lord desires to give abundant graces to those who ask for them (cf. Matthew 7:7-11), especially to those couples striving for holiness in the covenant of holy matrimony. The Lord loves the goodness of marriage and the joy that it can bring to His people. In fact, it is the vocation "written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator" (CCC 1603). To those preparing for the sacrament of marriage, I encourage you to allow Christ to be the one who forms and infuses with His grace your married life. To those already living in the covenant of holy matrimony, thank you for the witness you are giving to the world of the love that Jesus has for His Bride. To those who are considering a "marriage" outside of the sacrament of marriage, I challenge and encourage you to give God the opportunity to teach you about the magnitude of the relationship you are desiring to enter. After all, He created it! †

Father Jacob Degele was ordained a priest of the Bismarck Diocese on June 11, 2021.

Corazon

**Have you lost hope in your marriage?
You are not alone!**

For couples in crisis...Corazon can help you begin to put the pieces back together again.

For information on upcoming weekends, visit bismarckdiocese.com/corazon or scan the QR code:



Testimonials:

"We came into the weekend not knowing whether our marriage would survive and left revitalized with hope that it can be more beautiful than I even imagined."
- Corazon Attendee

"Corazon was a very effective tool as it provided us with much needed time away from the craziness of daily life. It served as a great refresher and reminder that God should be the center of our relationship. If we put Him first, the rest will fall into place. We had to be willing to show up, actively listen and do the work while everything else was taken care of by the team."
- Corazon Attendee





Preparing for marriage

Katie Kostelecky | Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life

“The purpose of the marriage preparation process is to ensure that the couple knows well who they are and who they are marrying, as well as give them an understanding of the gravity that marriage holds.”



When you get engaged, it becomes a whirlwind of preparation with deposits to be paid and people to talk to. The months leading up to the wedding turn into chaos as you make sure everything is in place. But if we slow down for just a moment and step back, we might see the value of this preparation period. Even if you are already married and missed out on the richness of this time, there is a chance to renew this period again and extract the gems to nourish your marriage.

The Bismarck Diocese has a few pieces in place to help prepare couples for marriage. The steps include meeting with a priest or deacon, completing a FOCCUS pre-marriage inventory (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study), possibly meeting with a sponsor couple, attending a pre-marriage seminar and learning a Natural Family Planning (NFP) method. To some, this may seem burdensome on top of what goes into planning a wedding, however, I would argue that these things are far more important than the decision between live flowers or fake flowers, etc. These programs are well thought out to give you and your fiancé the best foundation for a beautiful marriage.

The purpose of the marriage preparation process is to ensure that the couple knows well who they are and who they are marrying, as well as give them an understanding of the gravity that marriage holds. The FOCCUS inventory, for example, helps couples extract specific discussion points to grow deeper together, helping them understand themselves and each other better. Likewise, the pre-marriage seminar is a time for engaged couples to slow down apart from the hustle and bustle; it provides the opportunity to study and understand the richness and beauty of the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family. It is designed to help couples develop, encourage and enhance skills needed for a loving lifetime relationship in a sacramental marriage. During the weekend seminar, couples learn important skills for communication that can be used in the future. There is also opportunity for adoration, confession and Mass. These sacraments

are one of the best ways to prepare our hearts for the vocation of marriage. Finally, couples learn a method of NFP. Learning an NFP method allows for couples to cooperate with God’s plan for their family. NFP encourages real intimacy in marriage and fosters a relationship of deep love and mutual respect.

If you are already married and are looking for enrichment in these ways, consider spending time together to ask each other questions about goals or retake the “Five Love Languages” test to reconnect on things that may have changed over the course of your marriage. Stay close to the sacraments of confession and Mass to remain grounded in your faith and identity as God’s son or daughter. †

Katie Kostelecky is the Associate to the Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life in the Bismarck Diocese. She and her husband, Nathan, live in Bismarck, N.D.

5 ways to grow spiritually with your spouse

- ▶ Each night, spend time together praying. If you are not sure where to start, start by saying a “Glory Be” together and then each sharing three things you are grateful for in that day.
- ▶ Plan a day around a feast day of a saint that you are drawn to, start a tradition celebrating that day in a special way.
- ▶ Go to adoration together.
- ▶ Learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours together. This may seem daunting if you are not familiar with the Liturgy of the Hours, we recommend starting with night prayer.
- ▶ Pick a time to go to Mass together an additional time than you would normally go.



AB INITIO



Fr. Doug Krebs | Diocesan Priest

“From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.’ So, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mark 10:6-9). The Catholic Church, following the words of Jesus, has always taught that God instituted marriage, and that He made it in such a way that it is unchangeable. Therefore, the Church teaches that no pope, no religious leader, nor any governmental legislative body has the true authority to change what marriage is. Some of these authorities in the past have tried to change very important aspects of marriage, such as who can get married or when marriage ends, but we believe, as Catholics, that nothing has actually changed.

The question then needs to be asked, “What is marriage?” Marriage, in its essence, is a covenant, and a covenant is a sacred family bond in which

persons give themselves to one another in loving communion. This covenant, once validly contracted by the spouses, is completely indissoluble by any human power, because this bond is also established by God. The bride and groom, on the day of their wedding, desire to enter into this covenant, which is irrevocable and is so firm that even they, together or individually, won’t have the power to truly dissolve the marriage. The couple, at the exchange of consent, is basically stating that no amount of sin or problems will end or destroy this covenant, and that absolutely nothing but death dissolves this permanent bond between them.

Another reason why the covenant of marriage is unbreakable is because it is a mirror image of God’s love for His people. God has used covenants to establish His relationship with His people, and He, in a sense, “marries” them. God chose His people and promised that He will always remain faithful to them, no matter how wildly sinful they become. In the times of the Old Testament, His people would

sin and worship pagan gods, and they would then be accused of not only committing idolatry but also of committing adultery, since God made this covenant with them. God never ended His pact with them, even though they weren’t perfect and were unfaithful. As time went on in salvation history, God totally revealed Himself by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, who then established the new and eternal covenant with His Church. This covenant that He made is completely unbreakable, and He promised that He will be with her always and not allow the gates of hell to prevail over her. In the same manner as in the past, no matter how sinful and unfaithful the members or leaders of Jesus’ Church become, He will always be faithful and wait for their return to Him through repentance.

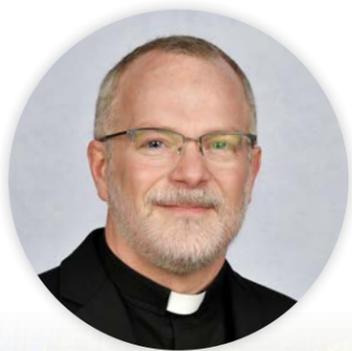
This covenantal love is the kind of love God desires for marriage. He intends that the love of the spouse be a chosen love. One that is healthy, stable and endures hardship. One that is self-sacrificial and willing to lay one’s life down for the other. This type

of love in marriage should also include romance and a spiritual bond between the man and the woman. It is hoped that for every marriage, there exists a good emotional relationship, but in the end that’s not what it is at its core. It is a covenant.

Marriage is then ordered to the good of the spouses. And what is the ultimate good of the spouses? The salvation of their souls. At the heart of every Christian marriage should be Jesus Christ. He is the one who saves us and strengthens marriages. He is the only one who can truly fulfill every individual and every marriage. In the end, only Jesus saves us or ultimately makes us happy. Therefore, Jesus needs to be the highest priority in every marriage.

For more of the Church’s teachings on marriage, read *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* CCC 1601-1666, 2360-2400.†

Father Doug Krebs is the Judicial Vicar for the Bismarck Diocese. He was ordained a priest on May 31, 2016.



Did God make sex too pleasurable?

Fr. Wayne Sattler | Diocesan Priest

It may come as a surprise to find such a question asked in this magazine, especially with it being raised by a priest. It is a question, however, that throughout the years in working with marriages and marriage preparation I have often jokingly provided an answer to by sharing my own perception that it seems God has made sex too pleasurable. That if God would have made it at the same level as a nice warm bath, we would have all been a lot safer. Has it not proven to be the number one area people find it a struggle to live a moral life? And yet, we must remember, God created sex, so it is no secret to Him how pleasurable it is. He knew that we would really, really like this gift. Imagine the joy it brought God to bestow on us this act that would help us appreciate our union with Him and root us in the truth of how the creation of new life is an act of love, His love. Would it not be fitting to at least give thanks to God with your spouse after the marital embrace, something as simple as saying, “How great Thou art.”

It is helpful to remember how there are only two relationships in which we can speak of true union, of the two becoming one: the union between a man and woman in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony and our union with God. Marital union is an image to help us appreciate the *reality* of our union with God. It is an image in the sense that the physical relationship between a man and woman is passing, but our union with God will never pass away. I have found it helpful to think of marriage as like a *photograph* of the Bahamas and union with God as like *being* in the Bahamas. A photograph is nice to have, to hang on your wall and let it inspire you to get to the Bahamas. When you arrive there, it will not even dawn on you to look at the picture, because you are immersed in the beauty of being in the Bahamas. In heaven, no one is going to miss the marital embrace. It will not even dawn on us to tell God how it might be a lot better in heaven if we just had sex twice a week. Our heavenly union with God will infinitely surpass the earthly experience of human intimacy.

To help impress this truth upon us, God calls some to renounce human sexuality. Why? It is not because human sexuality is bad. God created human sexuality as a beautiful, good gift—yet there is something greater. It is “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12) that some renounce the pleasure of the marital embrace. But for most humans, the marital embrace is given to help guide them along the way to the union we hope to enjoy in our heavenly homeland (Heb. 11:16).

Knowing the great dignity with which God has created this good gift of sexuality, the evil one does everything in his power to try and tarnish it. He wants to destroy the very image we are given to guide us toward our eternal intimacy with God. He has done (and continues to do) a very convincing job of getting us to regard sex as something much different than God created it to be. Some might think that sex is naughty or dirty; others would find it strange to bring God into the marital embrace. How did that happen? That certainly did not come from God. How God must grieve over the many relationships, the marriages, that experience deep turmoil over this

beautiful gift. How deeply God must long for us to appreciate this gift for what it was created to be.

There is a danger, perhaps more prevalent than ever, that our ability to experience real love will be hampered, if not blocked permanently. That was the observation of German philosopher, Josef Pieper, in his book, *Faith-Hope-Love*. He articulated the danger of when “sexual activity (is) separated from Eros.” The deadly sin of lust can so twist a person that they are unable to truly love. In the book, *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis helps us to appreciate how, “Sexual desire without Eros, wants *it*, the *thing in itself*; Eros wants the Beloved. The *thing* is a sensory pleasure; that is, an event within one’s own body.”

So, what is eros? Eros is one of the Greek words for love. In the English language, the one-word, *love*, is used with many different meanings. We love our parents, we love chocolate, we love puppy dogs, we love the weather, we love how someone looks, we love how they make us feel, we love by a conscious act of the will to do what is good for another by sacrificing for them. When someone says, “I love you,” what do they really mean? The Greek language in which the New Testament was written can be helpful here, as it has different words for love. Eros is one of them.

Eros is a love that affirms the goodness of a person through our desire to want to be with them. C.S. Lewis helps us appreciate how “Eros makes a man really want, not a woman, but one particular woman. . . . [T]he lover desires the Beloved herself, not the pleasure she can give.” Eros is a passionate love that seeks with sensual desire and longing. Eros is a love somehow rooted in our human nature, as in the first Adam who seeks Eve as the one who “at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23).

Agape, another Greek word for love, is a pure, unconditional love. Agape is a love that affirms the goodness of a person through what we are freely willing to sacrifice for their good. Agape is the good news of the love of Jesus Christ, the Second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), whose Passion led Him to seek us out to save us.

Eros has sparked many men, like the first Adam, to “leave his father and mother and cling to his wife” (Gen. 2:24). Agape is then able to guard that spark as it is fanned into the flame of the love we see in the last Adam, Jesus, who “loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25–26).

Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est*, helps us to appreciate how, “God loves, and His love may certainly be called *eros*, yet it is also totally *agape*.” In Jesus, we see the perfect blend of *eros* and *agape* as He seeks out His bride to save her by laying down His life for her. It is this fullness of love that pulls us out of ourselves, from merely clinging to another for the gifts we might like to receive from them, to loving “as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her.” The *other* we encounter is so wonderful that we lose ourselves. We recognize them as the gift, the one thing we are lacking, the person for whom we are willing to give up everything.

When sexual activity is separated from *eros*, our ability to love authentically is damaged, maybe forever. Pieper soberingly observes how when “sex enters youths’ consciousness and life before *eros* does . . . experiencing real love is hampered if not blocked permanently.” He goes on to creatively articulate how in separating sexual activity from *eros*, “the fig leaf has merely been moved to another place; it now covers the face.” The fig leaf was originally carefully placed to protect the dignity of the person. Their face remained in clear view. The fig leaf is now often intentionally moved, particularly in advertising and in the media, to disregard the person, to cover their face and see only a mere object of our personal pleasure. The evil one works so hard for this to happen in us because he knows that in moving the fig leaf to cover the face of the human person, the challenge of seeking the face of God would become all the greater. That is worth repeating. *By moving the fig leaf to cover the face of a human person, the evil one knew that it would become even more difficult for us to seek the face of God.*

The evil one knows that an *eros* that is not anchored in *agape* can carry us away from experiencing authentic love. Great care must be taken to ensure that it is the marital embrace being sought and not a mere sexual escape. To embrace means to take into one’s arms. To escape is to flee suffering by stepping “out of one’s cape.” The embrace is an *in*; the escape is an *out*. How fulfilling the experience of taking into one’s arms the commitment of being faithful in good times and bad, sickness and health, till death do they part, rather than merely looking for a moment’s escape from the hardships of life by stepping out of one’s capes.

So, did God make sex too pleasurable? Well certainly not in His mind, for when approached the right way, the marital embrace will anchor you more deeply together in the love of God. This is the whole purpose of marriage, a purpose that will not pass away. What a different world it would be if the aim of every husband was to love his wife “as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25–26). That is the world God created it to be, a world He will never give up on. It is the world that will be when the true Bridegroom returns for His bride. And that, we are assured, will be pure bliss! †

Father Wayne Sattler is the Spiritual Director for the Bismarck Diocese and resides in Bismarck, N.D. He was ordained a priest on June 19, 1997.



*Photo by Ben Gumeringer Photography:
Fr. Sattler witnessing a wedding at Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck N.D.*



When the 'I do' includes an 'I don't'

Matt and Mindy Dalton | Marriage Missionaries

Marriages are consummated when the words of our wedding vows become flesh in the marital embrace; and are renewed every time after that wedding day when the couple comes together in their sexual relationship. God's intention from the beginning of creation, when He created us male and female, was for the husband and wife to receive each other's bodies in a worthy manner. In the words of our vows, the bride and groom are asked, "Have you come here freely and to give yourselves away completely? Will you remain faithful as husband and wife all the days of your life? And will you accept children lovingly from God?" This kind of union lived out with our bodies as husband and wife is the very source of life, holiness and joy in marriage.

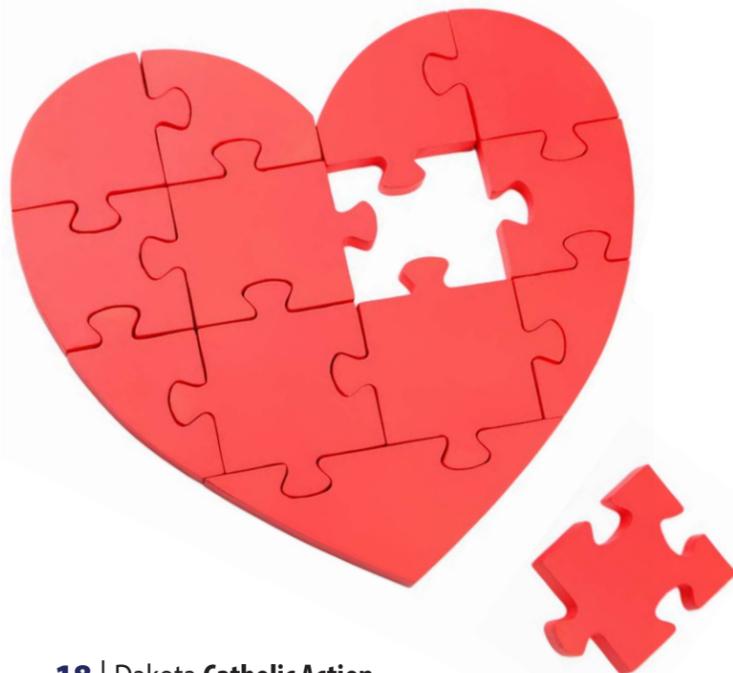
What if we are just going through the motions and don't really mean what we are saying? Or worse, we attempt to cancel what the sexual act means through an act of contraception or sterilization? What we are saying is, "I love everything about you, but not your fertility." Then the sexual union of the spouses becomes the source of a fundamental restlessness in our marriages that, over

time, will act subtly or not so subtly, chip away at our relationship from the inside out. The opposite of love is to use. The human person is made by love itself, God—the three persons of the Trinity—to love. We know when we are being used.

Have we ever pondered that God our Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit is the perfection of the eternal exchange of life and love and needed nothing? However, the very essence of love is to give itself away. God desires others to share in His glorious exchange of love. The human race's attitude towards sexuality for the past 50+ years has been to withdraw from the sacrifice, hold back, don't make a supreme gift of self, reject suffering and replace it with, "We know better than God."

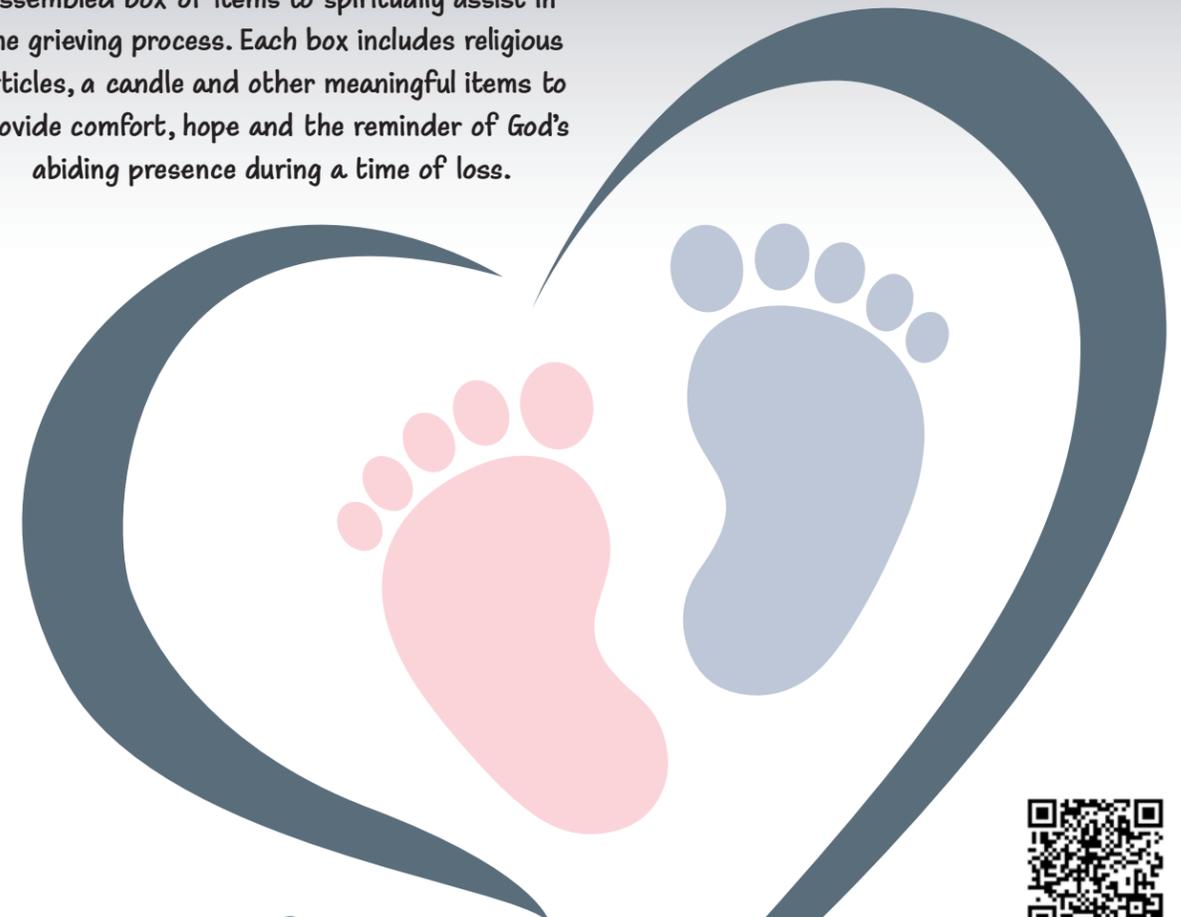
Pope Paul VI's encyclical entitled *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") is a profound explanation of what it means to be fully human—male and female—made in the image and likeness of God and the deep call as human beings to fully live this beauty out in our marriage and family lives. When we embrace all that Holy Mother Church gives us, we become a light of life—giving love to the world that points others to our Creator. Read or re-read *Humanae Vitae* today, ponder its words and pray with it. Every human being is supremely loved by God and He desires intimacy with each of us. Why does Jesus thirst? He desires that we love Him and our neighbor as He has loved us, so that we, too, can live in this world and the world to come—heaven, that is, life-giving love.†

This article is reprinted courtesy of the Denver Catholic. Matt and Mindy Dalton are full-time marriage missionaries and the co-founders of Marriage Missionaries. Their home is in Colorado, but they are often seen around the Bismarck Diocese speaking at different events and are part of the Corazon team. They were married in 1991 and have seven children.



No family should suffer through miscarriage or infant loss alone.

The Bismarck Diocese offers a thoughtfully assembled box of items to spiritually assist in the grieving process. Each box includes religious articles, a candle and other meaningful items to provide comfort, hope and the reminder of God's abiding presence during a time of loss.



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Little Souls



Bismarck Diocese
Office of Family Ministry
and Respect Life



FROM THE DESK OF A

Natural Family Planning instructor

Jana Heen | NFP Instructor

It has been 21 years since I began teaching one of the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) for the Bismarck Diocese. Numerous engaged couples, married couples and single women have sat across the desk from me over the years. Many eager to learn, some fulfilling a pre-marriage requirement, quickly discovering it was worth their time, and many others seeking answers for infertility or underlying health conditions. It has been an honor to teach and get to know them, empower them, hear their stories and journey with them through their joys and struggles.

In my own marriage, NFP has been a blessing. It's been almost 27 years since my husband and I were first married and began using NFP. Over the course of our marriage, we have used it to gain an understanding of our fertility and discern God's plan for us by remaining open to growing our family according to His will. We have been blessed with five children. NFP has also helped me with my personal health struggles with premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and low progesterone.

Over the years I have heard about every comment there is about NFP—from jokes poking fun at people who use it, to comments that misrepresent the true effectiveness and others that speak about its positive impact on their marriage and health. There is so much I could write about this topic, but I feel the following information is most important to share with readers.

Natural Family Planning is the general title for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either

achieve or postpone pregnancy. NFP methods are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. No drugs, devices or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy.

There are several methods taught within the Bismarck Diocese. Each of them varies in how they are taught, what they specialize in and what signs and symptoms they focus on. The Bismarck Diocese follows guidelines set forth by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in promoting methods that have been proven effective, are ethically sound in their teaching and respect the dignity of women, marriage and all stages of human life. It is important to use methods that are proven reliable and taught by trained instructors.

NFP methods can be used with regular cycles, irregular cycles, anovulatory states, breastfeeding, perimenopause and so many other situations. I've heard so many women tell me they don't have "regular" cycles, so they could never use NFP. I sometimes wonder, do they even know the information they need to be able to confidently say that? Countless women have said to me, as they learn NFP for the first time, "I didn't even know my body does this." I've loved watching women discover and understand themselves and feel empowered as they learn to chart their cycles. I have also talked with women who are using contraception for various reasons, but are not comfortable with it, due to side effects or moral reasons. Many of them have never been told any other way, or have fears, but when informed, begin to see NFP as possible for them.

As for men, and I think my husband would agree, they are in awe as they learn and use NFP. To be honest, I think they are in shock at first as they learn about the signs and symptoms that a woman's body displays, but we have good laughs and keep things lighthearted as they learn. In all my years of teaching, one of my favorite things to watch unfold before me is how men grow to see how their fiancé/wife are beautifully and wonderfully made. I've seen them grow in deeper appreciation for her and the role they play in respecting and caring for her.

Many couples have embraced the use of NFP within marriage. They experience the success of using it to grow their family, along with the challenges that come when cycles change or unveil underlying health issues. Most married couples I've worked with would agree that both experiences help them grow in their relationship and their faith. Most also agree that NFP is effective when used properly, but also not as a tool to control. For its true beauty to unfold, they find that remaining open to God's will brings them the most peace and freedom while

using it. Couples are called to be open to children in marriage, and it is for each couple to discern God's plan for them. Some have larger families; some have smaller families and some struggle to grow their family at all. Whatever the case, couples are encouraged to be free of judgement or comparison toward others, to focus on supporting one another and to view children as a blessing.

NFP methods are not just for married couples. adolescents and young women can learn to chart as they begin their cycles. By charting, they can understand their cycles, monitor their health and grow in respect for themselves and their body. Some of them experience difficulties with their cycles in the first years. Medical providers can use the information from charting to discover underlying causes for their symptoms and give effective treatments, often avoiding the birth control pill which is commonly prescribed to young women to control symptoms during this stage. And later in life, if called to marriage, these women will grow to use NFP within that context.

Finally, NFP method instructors help couples maintain confidence and provide support. Young women and couples are encouraged to keep in touch with their instructors, especially when difficulties arise. I have encountered couples who have had a decline in confidence with the use of NFP, especially when they are feeling called to space or delay pregnancy. Couples suffering from underlying health issues, trying to achieve pregnancy with no success, are left wondering what is wrong. These are examples that put strain on marital relationships and are often accompanied by underlying fears or concerns. In almost all cases, instructors can build confidence again by reviewing method instructions and, in some cases, recommend another method more suitable for their situation or as a supplement to their current method. For those struggling to achieve pregnancy, instructors help to ensure couples are using the method correctly and refer them to medical providers who will work cooperatively with their cycles to find underlying causes and reliable ethical treatments. In the case of couples suffering with fears or questions, an instructor listens and

often makes a referral to a priest or counselor who can help them find peace again.

I've heard some say that NFP is one of the best kept secrets out there for women's health and fertility. I find that funny, because it hasn't been a secret at all. In his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI specifically called upon men of science to "labor to explain more thoroughly the various conditions favoring a proper regulation of births," while adhering to faith and reason. He encouraged them to contribute to the development of natural family planning methods. In response, this is why we have several NFP methods available today and the research backing them. Visit the Bismarck Diocese website for more information about NFP methods taught in our diocese, their effectiveness and how to begin learning. Feel free to reach out to instructors like me for support or to answer questions. †

Heen has taught Creighton Model FertilityCare System for 21 years and is currently the Intake Coordinator for the Bismarck FertilityCare Center. She and her husband, Jason, reside in Bismarck, N.D. and have five children.



Photo by Lauren Wilkens: A wedding at the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck, N.D.

Prayer for Husbands and Wives to Embrace God's Plan for Married Love and the Gift of Life

Lord God,

Send forth Your Holy Spirit to open the minds and hearts of Your children, so that they may discover Your gifts of marriage and family.

Grant, we pray, that they may reject all falsehood.

Strengthen married couples so that they may fulfill their mission to reveal Your spousal love in the world and to steward the gift of life.

Heal any brokenness in them and help them to reject all that harms fidelity and fruitfulness.

Bestow Your grace upon husbands and wives that they may be open to life and be transformed by Your divine love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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Hannah's Hope

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Theology of the Body explained

Fr. Dustin Johns | Diocesan Priest

Marriage preparation involves planning a ceremony and a reception, but its deepest purpose is to prepare your hearts and lives for a profound, lifelong covenant. The Catholic Church’s “Theology of the Body” (TOB), a teaching developed by Saint John Paul II, offers a transformative lens through which to understand God’s divine plan for love, sexuality and marriage. It provides the spiritual foundation for a truly Christian marriage by answering the fundamental questions:

“Who am I?” and “What is my purpose?”

The foundation of TOB is the understanding that human persons are made in the image of the Triune God, who is an eternal exchange of love. We are created to live not as isolated individuals, but in an intimate personal communion of self-giving love, mirroring the inner life of the Trinity. This is the “law of the gift”—fulfillment is found not in self-assertion or “self-getting love,” but in making a sincere gift of oneself to another.

In the creation account, God states, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Man discovers his humanity through his relationship with woman, realizing his identity only by existing with someone and ultimately for someone. Your upcoming marriage is the specific way you will live out this calling, giving yourselves entirely to one another, with nothing held back.

Your bodies, in their masculinity and femininity, have a “nuptial meaning.” They are designed to reveal your call to become a gift for one another; that each gender brings out the best in the other. Males aren’t lacking anything because they aren’t females, likewise females aren’t lacking anything because they aren’t males; they complement each other.

St. John Paul II stated: “The body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine,” revealing a mystery hidden in God from the beginning. The marital act in marriage is a profound “language of the body” where husband and wife express in action the total, lifelong gift of self they committed to in their vows.

For the marital act’s bodily language to be truthful, it must reflect God’s love by being:

Free: Given without coercion, requiring mastery over passions for a genuine “yes.”

Total: A complete gift of body and soul, including fertility, holding nothing back.

Faithful: An exclusive, permanent commitment for life to one person.

Fruitful: The act is open to procreation, which is a potential fruit of the marital union.

Living this truth requires prayer, sacraments like the Eucharist and reconciliation, and virtues such as self-discipline and chastity. Practices like Natural Family Planning (NFP) align with God’s design by respecting fertility and remaining open to life, unlike contraception which hinders the total gift of self.

Your marriage, when lived according to the truth of the body, becomes a “primordial sacrament” that communicates the mystery of God’s Trinitarian love to your children and the world. The grace of the sacrament strengthens every aspect of your shared life.

As you prepare for marriage, remember your creation for an eternity of love. Living out the Theology of the Body teaches you to love like Christ, building a home that is a light of God’s love and preparing your souls for heaven, where you will experience union with God in resurrected bodies. †

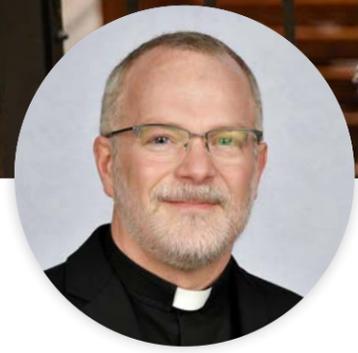
Father Dustin Johns was ordained a priest of the Bismarck Diocese on June 12, 2023.



Photo by Wild Prairie Photography: Bride and groom at Our Lady of Victory Chapel, Bismarck, N.D.

SACRAMENT OF

mission



Fr. Wayne Sattler | Diocesan Priest

If we were asked to name the sacraments of the Catholic Church, holy matrimony might not be the first one that comes to mind. If we were pressed a bit further to name the minister of each sacrament, we might even struggle to get the one for holy matrimony right.

It might help us to keep the beauty and power of this sacrament of holy matrimony closer to heart by realizing how God had a one-track mind in establishing all the sacraments: UNION! The whole purpose of each sacrament is for the people of God to become one with Him!

Baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist are recognized as the sacraments of initiation. Through them, God clears the path to union with Him. The great obstacle of original sin is washed away through the waters of baptism. In baptism, God marks our soul as belonging to Him, forming us to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. God is now in us, and we are in God. The journey to be one with Him forever has been set! To assist us in the day-to-day striving to remain in that union, we are given the virtues of faith, hope and love in baptism, and are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in confirmation. To cap it all off, as the source and summit of all the sacraments, God

makes union with Him especially clear in the Most Holy Eucharist. In it, the sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ that has made the path to union with God possible is celebrated. Then, in Holy Communion we enter an experience of that union in a very tangible way by having the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ become one with our body, blood, soul and humanity.

Reconciliation and anointing of the sick are the sacraments of healing. They are given to restore anything that might become an obstacle to our union with God along the way, specifically our experience of sin and suffering. Reconciliation frees us from our sins, and the anointing of the sick strengthens the suffering soul in the truth of how they are not alone. Our Lord and His Church are with them, accompanying them as they bear this specific cross, strengthening them to carry it in such a way that it brings about a deeper union with Him.

God then calls certain souls to have their union with Him sealed and strengthened through holy orders and holy matrimony, the sacraments of mission. The “mission” of the Church is to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt. 28:19). Holy orders and holy matrimony are aimed at assisting other souls in becoming disciples. Holy orders draws a man into such a deep intimacy with Our Lord that they become “another Christ.” The deacon, priest and bishop are sent forth by the Church to assist others in growing closer to Christ, particularly through their celebration of the sacraments. In holy matrimony, a man and woman are drawn together into such a unique intimacy with Christ that the two

of them become one. Together with Christ, they can be a force to reckon with!

The primary mission of holy matrimony is to assist one another in growing closer in union with God. They then collaborate with God in His power to create new human life. With every child God entrusts to their care, their mission of making disciples is broadened. For those who listen attentively together to God, they will be entrusted with the number of children God desires them to have. For those whose deep desire to conceive children is not brought to fruition, they will need to listen even more carefully. Like the priest whom God might call to live a contemplative vocation, the Lord is entrusting to them a unique mission, which from the outside will look different from most, yet none the less important. As Pope Pius XI recognized of the contemplative, they in fact “make a greater contribution to the progress of the Church . . . for if they were not to call down the abundance of graces to water the field, the laborers of the gospel would derive a much poorer harvest” (Bull *Umbratilem*).

In the sacrament of holy matrimony, it is important for married couples to appreciate how God has a specific intention for bringing their two souls together. The married couple who listens attentively together will continually be led to ways in which they, together with Christ, will serve the Church’s mission of drawing more souls closer to Him. It is in the same way that a bishop and priest listen to God together for how this priest will best serve in the diocese Christ has entrusted to the bishop.

The man and woman are especially equipped for this listening together as it is they who are the ministers of the sacrament of holy matrimony. To be the celebrants of that sacrament, they will need to be properly prepared, they will need to know what they are doing as ministers of this sacrament and then celebrate it the right way on the day of their marriage so that God might act through them in joining them together as one. They are then a force to be reckoned with, for “what God has joined, let no one separate.” From that day forth, God is wanting and willing to work through them for the sake of the mission of the Church, of drawing more souls into union with Him.

It is perhaps easy for us to recognize how the deacon, priest and bishop are on the front lines for the Church’s mission to draw souls into union with God. It is through them that souls will be baptized, confirmed, receive the Most Holy Eucharist, be forgiven of their sins in reconciliation and strengthened for their suffering in the anointing of the sick. Yet where would their efforts be without

the man and woman who allow God to work through them by presenting their child for baptism, bringing their family to Church for Mass, praying together at home and modeling why one might desire to live a life in union with God. Whether the family household God entrusts to them consists of the two of them or of 10 children, let us never lose sight of how, when amidst all the demands of daily life, they rise-up in their desire to live a life in union with God; they are a leaven to their communities!

So just as we pray for men to hear and respond to the call of God to follow His Son in His holy priesthood, let us continue to pray for the hearts of God’s sons and daughters whom He calls to holy matrimony to rise and respond to the mission God is entrusting to them! †

Father Wayne Sattler is the Spiritual Director for the Bismarck Diocese and resides in Bismarck, N.D. He was ordained a priest on June 19, 1997.



Matt and Mindy Dalton | Marriage Missionaries

Worth the wait

We have all been to weddings, where we have that anticipated moment for the bride to walk down the aisle. We stand, turn towards the back of the church in unison, and we wait. I, however, like to focus on the groom; seeing how his nerves manifest themselves; is he sweating, what is his body saying? As he waits to see his bride, his eyes lock with hers, his smile cracks as his chin quivers to fight back the joyous tears, he takes in a huge breath to regroup and wipes his tears as her dad reaches to shake his hand... this reveals that this woman is worth the wait!

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive,” said Bishop Saint Irenaeus. Soaking in this wisdom, that God receives glory when humans are alive in His fullness, which includes life, love and God’s gifts is inspiring. As God thirsts for us to be fully alive, we too thirst for our children and grandchildren to be “fully alive”—in Him.

How as parents and grandparents do we impart this goodness to our children and grandchildren, especially in our times where it is tempting to be skeptical or even lose hope in our culture? In the United States, we are experiencing 61 percent fewer marriages today than in 1971. In recent years, the divorce rate in America has dropped in large part because of the more widely accepted experiment of cohabitation.

Saying nothing on the topic of cohabitation and sexuality has been the default option for far too long. Most of us feel unequipped to talk about these

sensitive issues. However, remaining silent and uninformed makes us blind, “And if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Mt. 15:14).

People are prolonging or even opting out of marriage to put their relationships on a “trial run.” Cohabitation is living together in a sexual relationship before marriage. Many people look around at our world attacked by miserable marriages and constant divorces, and ask, “Is this kind of love, married love, even possible?” Saint Thomas More, who was martyred for defending marriage said, “Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.”

Pope St. John Paul II, in his hope to restore purity to humanity, often emphasized that; “The sexual drive is a gift from God.” However, he maintained that sexual desire must never be separated from love—the will to do what is best for the other. Cohabitation or sex outside of marriage may be one of our desires; however, these behaviors are poor ways to execute our desires because they lack commitment and love. When we separate our desires from love, we use another as though they were some “thing” rather than “someone.”

Why wait? “Yes, we are cohabitating, but we do love each other, and we do want to will the good of the other. What is the big deal with living together and having sex before or after marriage?” God designed sexual intimacy to be a sacred expression of total self-giving love and openness to bringing children into this lifelong commitment of marriage. Engaging in any kind of sexual activity outside of

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God’s design for marriage can lead to numerous negative consequences, including emotional, physical and spiritual harm, as well as undermining the true purpose of human sexuality.

God certainly gives us the freedom to choose. When we choose to invite God into our relationships and follow His design, He accompanies us. When we choose to follow our own path i.e. cohabitation, we are basically saying, “We know better than you, God.” We miss the mark in our relationships, and we cut ourselves off from the source, God, and His grace (power and help). God will never abandon us, He will remain in pursuit, subtly, in hopes that we turn back to Him. However, He will never force us. Cohabiting and sexually active couples outside the marriage bond/covenant begin to make it easy to “slide” in and out of relationships, rather than “decide” to commit. Conversely, a man and a woman who freely embrace God’s glorious plan for their sexuality find that the “marital embrace” is set apart and well worth the wait.

If we are going to capture the hearts of people in our modern world, we will need to foster encounters with beauty to do it. The main message that we have gotten in our upbringings is that religion is opposed to passion, longings and desires. So just don’t think about those things and follow the rules. Modern man rejects this approach because the heart feels the absence of beauty, and we are made for beauty.

What beauty captures your heart? A majestic Colorado sunset, a fine piece of art, a banquet of fine food, a person? Think about what grabs your heart and why. Ask your children and grandchildren about beauty and what stirs their hearts and why.

When we are drawn to something or someone beautiful, we are tapping into the God given desires of the human heart. The hunger of our hearts, left

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at the surface level, can stop at self-seeking base pleasures that eventually lead to emptiness. By allowing that beauty to take us higher, however, it awakens a thirst for something bigger, something outside of ourselves—God.

Loving another this way (as God loves us) is why the bride and groom can boldly proclaim, “You were worth the wait.” †

This article was reprinted courtesy of the Denver Catholic. Matt and Mindy Dalton are full-time marriage missionaries and the co-founders of Marriage Missionaries. Their home is in Colorado, but they are often seen around the Bismarck Diocese speaking at different events and are part of the Corazon team. They were married in 1991 and have seven children.



Abby Langerud | Special Contributor

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING OUT THE VIRTUES OF JUSTICE, PERSEVERANCE AND CHASTITY IN MARRIAGE

Living virtuous lives is the changing of your ethos to order it in a way to love like God loves. Love is willing the good of the other without expecting anything in return. It is not just an emotion but a decision. You may not always feel love for your spouse but choosing to do so anyway is still love. This can be a hard concept to get behind in today's culture for it has been reduced to solely desire and if there is no desire, that means there is no obligation to perform the acts that love demands. This way of thinking builds a selfishness in one's heart.

You must be able to love regardless of what you receive back. Look at Jesus on the cross, He subjected Himself to torture so we may offer Him as a bridge sacrifice to union with God. He freely gave us this gift, and we have the choice to receive or reject it. To live a Christian married life is to follow Jesus's example by offering our whole selves to our spouses. This is a calling we are freely

offered to follow; however, all choices have consequences and every day we do not choose to act on this example, we will have to tell God, face to face on our last day, why we rejected this choice.

Our marriage vocation needs to be taken seriously for the good of our soul, our spouse's soul, for the rightful upbringing of our children and for the well-being of our community. This is why it is gravely important to look to virtues to structure our lives. Practicing the virtues of justice, perseverance and chastity will help deepen our friendship with God and our spouse to strengthen that eternal bond we committed to on the altar in our marriage.

The virtue of justice

The response to an injustice and the desire for it to be set right is a normal human emotion. Anger, when ordered properly, is not a sin. In fact, the emotion of anger can provide the right motivation to stand up to an injustice or a due that is owed. So, what is justice and why should we seek to be just people in our marriages? Justice is the giving of a due that is owed to God or another person. Correcting wrongs by going to confession and giving apologies, offering the praise God is due, and fulfilling our responsibilities to our spouse is all justice.

When we are unjust to our spouse, anger and a buildup of resentment occurs in relationships. This is not to say that there are not situations where you have a right to that anger, however, you are under obligation to "settle with your opponent quickly" (Mat 5:25). The feeling of anger lets you know that something is disordered. A just person in a marriage will work to correct that disorder in a gentle and upright manner with your spouse as soon as possible, lest that anger becomes distorted and turns what was concern for the injustice into justifying the anger to satisfy their own means how "I see fit." Letting anger take hold will cloud fair judgement and lead to irrational actions that harm the love between husband and wife. When the love of spouses becomes strained, homes start to feel unsafe and chaotic.

Families ultimately are seeking peace in their homes. When spouses feel discontented, there is a restlessness inside their hearts that pours out into the state of their homes and relationships with their spouse and children.

We can look to the example of the Holy Family to find the answer on how to cultivate a family life that is secure from vices and sins that destroy marriage. From the time of Mary's first yes to the angel Gabriel to the death of her son Jesus on the cross, there was fear, anger and persecution surrounding the family but their home, no matter where they found themselves, was marked with a resounding stillness. There was no fear or distrust, for they were wholly united to God, and, in God, these things do not exist. "Peace is 'the tranquility of order.' Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity" (CCC 2304). This stillness and Christ-like gentleness we all seek within ourselves and in our homes is only found in God and peace is the fruit.

It is common to feel uncomfortable with inner quiet, but it is necessary if we seek that calm in our relationships and home life. Only He can help you achieve this, so ask Him for His help and the grace for it to bear fruit upon your marriage. The fruits of this will vary but, commonly, you will find ease in how you speak with your spouse in honesty on all matters so that there is no room for resentment to build. Signs of growth in your marriage in practicing the virtue of justice are an increase of the spirit of joy, filling your home and your marriage with more laughter and a marital bond that provides safety and security that is felt throughout your home.

The virtue of perseverance

There is a saying that the one fear people have that is worse than death is public speaking because the feeling of being judged and isolated from society feels worse than death. We have been created for community with one another, so this fear of not belonging influences our behaviors. When there is a restlessness in our soul, we seek to perform, in order to belong and be loved. Productivity and busyness are how society measures your contribution to the world, making you worthy of belonging. This is one of the great successes of the devil, getting people to believe that we must earn our belonging when it has been freely given to us in God our Father. We see this in the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. The devil tempted our first parents into becoming like God, but the truth is that they already were like Him, perfect without sin and able to be in complete communion with the Creator, no divide. They did not have to do anything to earn this relationship. When we seek for



Original image titled *Wedding of Joseph and Mary* by Władysław Drapiewski. Alterations by Print Hideout Printable Art, Etsy.

a true understanding with the Holy Spirit in our identity as belonging to the Father as His son or daughter, our hearts become still in the confidence gained by knowing we have protection and love no matter what we do. We no longer need to perform to earn. In this confidence, you will receive clarity on how to properly order your life to best serve God and your spouse.

Choosing to be distracted by or committed to things that inhibit your ability to perform your duties is sloth. In the book titled *Glittering Vices*, author Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung explains that “Sloth on this view is apathy-comfortable indifference to duty and neglect of other human beings.” Sloth is not just what most people consider laziness, but can also be exhibited by being too busy, therefore neglecting your responsibilities.

In her book, DeYoung writes, “Sloth sabotages sanctification—the transforming power of God’s love in us. By sapping our willingness to lay down our old loves for the sake of love of God, it saps our energy for good altogether, since God is the source of that strength. As a result, sloth has a twofold effect. First, it makes us want to avoid activities and people that bring us face-to-face with our identity in Christ—most obviously, things like prayer, worship, scripture, and the sacraments. Secondly, however, this vice builds a cold wall between us and the demands of love for others.”

Persevering in loving your spouse every day even during those “dry spells” by choosing to complete your daily obligations and sacrifices. The spending of intentional time together can be much harder to do day in and day out than the escape that distractions provide but is vital in taking action against sloth and deepening your bond with your spouse.

You can apply this perseverance in how your day is structured. You must give your time first to God. Ask Him how He would like you to do this. A good first step is to prepare our souls for heaven by praising God daily, just as we find the angels and saints doing. Finding a set time every day to build friendship with God in prayer is important. God gives abundantly to those who serve Him. A good question to ask yourself if you struggle in this area is—if you do not make time for God, then why am I Christian? This is not a judgement but an encouragement

to search your heart and come to a knowing about what you believe and how that shapes the way you live out your interior and exterior life.

Second, look at your relationship with your spouse and have a conversation with them and God about how your friendship can deepen. How can you work on perfecting it to mimic our first parents before the Fall as God intended? The commandment “thou shall not have any gods before me” can help you root out the “gods” in your life that are prohibiting you from the order you must give your life of God first, spouse second, children third and family/friends last. Doing this will free you from being a slave of activities and habits that keep you away from your spouse and family. It frees your mind, body and soul to give your time and attention to what is needed for the proper ordering of your life. It is understanding the balance so that you can have a meaningful home life and intentional community.

The virtue of chastity

The steppingstone to build lasting intimacy with your spouse can be summed up in how the Catechism describes chastity. “The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate... Chastity is expressed notably in friendship with one’s neighbor. Whether it develops between persons of the same or opposite sex, friendship represents a great good for all. It leads to spiritual communion” (CCC §2347). Becoming personal friends with Jesus allows necessary grace to flow through us to achieve that perfect intimacy and love He models for us in our marriage.

Ask God to help posture your heart in humility and ask him how He would like you to grow in personal relationship with Him; He will always show you. Simply start by imagining Jesus by your side in everything you do. Imagine His hands working with yours. You can (may feel awkward at first but so are most friendships when getting to know someone) imagine Jesus by you and talk out loud (there is a unique power in talking out loud) to him about anything as you would a friend. Then allow your heart and mind to be still for Jesus to speak to you. As you grow in

your intimacy with Jesus you will start to recognize where the holes in the intimacy in your marriage are and what needs to be done to fill it. As we lean into our identities as sons and daughters of God, we will always feel our “cups” being filled as we pour ourselves out to our spouses. We will never be depleted when we recognize that with God as our dear Father; we will always have the grace and love we need ourselves.

If chastity can be found in friendships, when we become better friends with our spouse, there is less room to fall into lustful desires which is a common hardship in marriage. “Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes” (CCC 2351). This can shape itself in many ways, such as objectifying the other sex, masturbation and pornography. It can be having a posture of viewing your own spouse as a means to satisfy oneself. While that can be a fruit of sexual intimacy, it is not primarily other focused which is not what we are called to in love. Love is doing the most good for the other without expecting anything in return.

Take a moment to reflect on the kind of mindset you have in your marriage and how that is shaping the culture of your relationship. Do you have a mindset of love or disordered pleasure? We should ask our loving Father to give us a continual conversion of heart towards the posture of true love with our spouse. We must recognize that this will come at a cost to us. Since the first act of dismissal of God’s love during the Fall, a divide between God and man occurred. Anytime man tries to unify that divide, it will always come with a cost of sacrifice.

This is first seen in the Old Testament; women first bearing pain during childbirth to bring love into the world and sacrifices of the first crop and of animals to God in reparation for sins. We see this cost of sacrifice in our marriages as well anytime we go out of our way to help our spouse. However, the best example of sacrifice we have is Jesus dying on the cross and us offering Him up as a sacrifice at every Mass, all so that we can receive the grace needed through His suffering to love as God loves every day. If you look at other “gods,” it always involves sacrificing something of us to them.

In Christianity, our God is so good He gives us Himself to use as a sacrifice every day. He offers something of His—His whole body, to give to us to sacrifice to the Father. In our marriages, we need to look at Jesus for our example of how we have committed our whole bodies every day to our spouse, no exceptions. Jesus was not given an exception—“My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt. 26:39)—so neither are we.

On our wedding day, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself” (CCC 1639). This seal demonstrates the gravity of our duty that we promised on the altar before God that we will always seek true intimacy with our spouse in love and sacrifice and it will be answerable upon our death. “It is therefore fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice” (CCC 1621).

Understanding the seriousness in which we need to deepen our loving relationship with our spouse is the first step. Ask Jesus, in your personal relationship with Him, how He would like you to do this. You can also ask this with your spouse by praying simple prayers together that will help in your sharing of your relationship with God.

Here are some other practices you can start with your spouse. Find ways to play together. Yes, actually play like children. How can you be silly and fun with your spouse? This play can help break down and/or reveal any walls you have built up that don’t allow you to be open and simply be with your spouse. How about the intellect? Are you and your spouse engaging your minds together to talk about ideas? Do you read books or talk about topics that provoke conversation for deeper insight into your beliefs? These things will help you get to know yourself and your spouse in a much deeper way. †

Abby and her husband reside in Bismarck, N.D.



Matt Dalton | Marriage Missionary

True freedom

Twenty years ago, we were married with three children chasing the things of this world: careers to be had, a house to attain and a net worth to begin building. As cradle Catholics, sadly, we were only going through the motions with our faith. In the last of my single years and into our marriage, I went away from the sacrament of reconciliation; convincing myself, “Why do I have to go tell my junk to another man? I am not doing those things anymore. I mean, God will forgive me. Won’t He? The Bible says He will. Won’t He?” To me, at that time in my life, the sacraments that you receive growing up were more about the ritual and ceremony.

Reluctantly, I decided I should maybe try that confession thing again. Before returning, I took a blank legal pad and

began to examine my life over the past several years; and it all started to be illuminated, writing for several pages. It was my return to confession and now frequent visits to this illustrious sacrament that constantly transforms my life.

Our beloved priests in the confessional are “in persona Christi,” a Latin phrase meaning “in the person of Christ.” I never understood the stupendously glorious value of Holy Mother Church that Jesus established and left this for us so that we could receive His help, love, mercy and grace. After hearing my six pages of sin, the priest put his finger on a sin of lust (self-gratification) that I hadn’t planned on ever confessing. A spiritual battle ensued in my head and heart, “Uh, I’m not confessing that, I thought. That

Pornography Recovery

Bismarck Diocese
Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life

For more information and resources visit bismarckdiocese.com/antipornography or scan the QR code:

“Many good people struggle with the sin of pornography and are striving to cultivate chastity. You are not alone. Jesus is with you, and the Church offers you love and support. Trust in the Lord’s mercy and his power to free and heal you.”
—Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography, Abridged Version, USCCB

is nobody's business. I am not saying that sin out loud; it doesn't hurt anyone and it's private and why is he asking me that?" After what seemed like a lifetime but was only seconds, and only by the grace of God, I confessed, "Yes, that, too." With that and the mighty words of absolution, I was flooded with Jesus' love and mercy and was released from that sin. As St. Paul says, "Wherever sin is, grace abounds the more." I truly believe that I met Jesus in that confessional that day and He read my soul.

If you, too, are struggling with sins of lust or things you did that you are ashamed of, be not afraid of the sacrament of reconciliation. The enemy wants us to keep these things in the dark, in the shadows. Keeping them quiet imprisons us and away from true freedom. Jesus longs to liberate us from ourselves and our sins to set us free to love others as He loves us.

Making alibis, excuses or rationalizing our sinful behavior only repels God's grace. Jesus established His Church knowing we need His pardon and peace. Humbly, we bring all our sins to the light, our hearts become malleable in the hands of our Creator and we become a new creation. As God's grace and love penetrate our hearts, our new behaviors allow us to live out the greatest two commandments—loving God with our whole mind, body and soul and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. †

This article was reprinted courtesy of the Denver Catholic. Matt and Mindy Dalton are full-time marriage missionaries and the co-founders of Marriage Missionaries. Their home is in Colorado, but they are often seen around the Bismarck Diocese speaking at different events and are part of the Corazon team. They were married in 1991 and have seven children.



Amanda Jensen
Director, Office of Family
Ministry and Respect Life

MARRIAGE IN THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH

Upholding the Sacred Covenant of Marriage

We live in a society in which the sacred dignity of marriage is often overshadowed or misunderstood. Marriage is no longer recognized as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman. Cohabitation has become increasingly common, and couples choose to delay marriage until later in life. Children are born to parents who are not united in the sacrament of marriage and married couples remain childless by choice and without just reason. Secular practices are frequently chosen over sacred customs. Even in the face of these cultural challenges, the Church continues to proclaim the beauty of the sacrament of matrimony and support individuals and families with truth, compassion and hope.

While modern society offers many opposing views on marriage, the Catholic Church provides constant and faithful guidance, rooted in the sacred covenant of matrimony. Below is a comparison of worldly perspectives and the Church's teachings on marriage. †



Marriage is...

THE WORLD

JUST A PIECE OF PAPER

Marriage is often seen as a contract—a legally binding union between two partners in a personal relationship and nothing more than just a piece of paper.

THE CHURCH

A SACRAMENT

CCC 1617: "Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant."

Marriage is...

THE WORLD

BETWEEN TWO OR MORE BEINGS

Two or more individuals are recognized in a union, such as in polygamy (sister wives, brother husbands) and polyamory.

A union can be between anyone, regardless of their gender.

Humans can even marry artificial intelligence (AI) beings.

Anyone has a "right" to a marriage to whomever or whatever they desire.

"Love is love" mentality - the belief that all forms of sincere, consensual romantic love are equally valid and valuable, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the people involved.

TEMPORARY

Divorce is an option if the relationship doesn't work out. Pre-nuptial contracts ensure couples have a roadmap for potential divorce.



THE CHURCH

A UNION BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN

Matthew 19: 4-5: "...He who made them from the beginning made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.'"

CCC 2357: They (homosexual acts) "are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved."

CCC 1645: "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord...must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection. Polygamy is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive."



UNTIL DEATH DO YOU PART

CCC 2382: The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble...Between the baptized, 'a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any other reason other than death.'"

ABOUT YOUR OWN HAPPINESS

If a couple is happy, they should stay married but, if one or both are unhappy, then why should they stay married?

Couples choose to align marriage with their own life goals, own career or own desires, not always considering their spouse's goals, career or desires.

SELF-FULFILLING

Couples actively and intentionally make the choice to ignore the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood and not have children, prioritizing their personal freedom and individual desires.

"Childfree by choice" is a growing movement in which adults choose to forgo parenthood in lieu of their own interests.

Fertility is seen as a burden to be managed unless it is intentionally desired.



A PATH TO HOLINESS

CCC 1641: "'By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God.' This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they 'help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children.'"



LIFE-FULFILLING

CCC 1652: "'...marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring, and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.'"

CCC 1654: "Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice."

CCC 2368: "...this responsibility concerns the regulation of procreation. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood...When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone; but it must be determined by objective criteria...this is possible only if the virtue of married chastity is practiced with sincerity of heart."

Photo by Glasser Images: Wedding at Church of Our Lady of Grace, Minot, N.D.

SHARING A HOME AND LIFE OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

Couples frequently choose to live together prior to marriage, to make life easier or better, or even "just because."

Cohabitation is often seen as a replacement to marriage.

Cohabiting is sometimes seen as an alternative to marriage.



SHARING A HOME AND LIFE WITHIN MARRIAGE

CCC 2391: "Some today claim a 'right to a trial marriage' where there is an intention of getting married later. However firm the purpose of those who engage in premature sexual relations may be, 'the fact is that such liaisons can scarcely ensure mutual sincerity and fidelity in a relationship between a man and a woman, nor, especially, can they protect it from inconstancy and desires of whim.' Carnal union is morally legitimate only when a definitive community of life between a man and woman has been established. Human love does not tolerate 'trial marriages.' It demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another."



CHOOSING SECULARITY AND PERSONAL PREFERENCES

A personal and/or secular marriage gives the couple freedom to choose exactly what they want without having to follow what they view as social constraints.

Making wedding plans to fit own desires and needs, to what makes sense to selves and partner.



A CHOICE

Why get married when you can live together or have kids without going through the hassle of getting that piece of paper?

CHOOSING THE SACRED AND TRADITIONAL

CCC 1621: "In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Pascal mystery of Christ. ... spouses should seal their consent...by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ, they may form but 'one body' in Christ."

A CALLING

CC 1643: Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility.

Love is...

THE WORLD

A FEELING

An emotion that can be fleeting and can come and go. It is the same between people of any gender; the definition doesn't change.

THE CHURCH

A VOCATION

A love between one man and one woman, called to the live the vocation of marriage until death does them part.

CCC 1604: "God who created man out of love also calls him to love - the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love."



The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) contains profound wisdom and serves as a wonderful resource for all Catholics to gain a better understanding of the Church's teachings. It is an invaluable guide both for couples discerning the vocation of marriage and for those already living it, to more fully understand God's plan for marriage and to help them grow in love, faith and holiness together. †

Amanda is the Director of the Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life for the Bismarck Diocese. Amanda, her husband, and their five children live in Mandan, N.D.

Photo by Ben Gumeringer Photography: Bride and groom at the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck, N.D.

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PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The Bismarck Diocese is firmly committed to the health and protection of our children, young people and vulnerable adults. With the hope of healing the pain and suffering from sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, we encourage anyone who has suffered from this abuse to please come forward and let us know. To report allegations of sexual abuse, please contact: Deacon Brent Naslund, Chancellor, Bismarck Diocese, PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575. Phone: 701-223-1347 or 1-877-405-7435. Email the victim assistance coordinator, Joyce McDowall, at victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The Catholic Church must be exemplary: Clergy, staff, whether diocesan or parish, and volunteers are held accountable for their behavior. To enable the highest level of accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous definition of appropriate behavior. To this end, this Code of Conduct is defined for the Bismarck Diocese and it provides a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards for all personnel. View the Code of Conduct at www.bismarckdiocese.com.

Prayer for Life

Father and Maker of all,
You adorn all creation
with splendor and beauty,
and fashion human lives
in Your image and likeness.

Awaken in every heart
reverence for the work of Your hands,
and renew among Your people
a readiness to nurture and sustain
Your precious gift of life.

Grant this through our Lord
Jesus Christ, Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

*Credit: © United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,
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Additional Resources



For more resources related to Marriage and Family, visit bismarckdiocese.com/resources or scan the QR code below.



Bismarck Diocese
Office of Family Ministry
and Respect Life