

Married Life



An Inside Look

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*We lovingly dedicate this book
to the four people who have taught us
virtually everything we know
about living our marriage vows
without ever interfering in our marriage:
our parents,
Thomas A. and Maureen O. Manion,
and
Edward E. and Mary W. Schlumpf.*

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Series Foreword

An old Hasidic legend about the mysterious nature of life says that God whispers into your newly created soul all the secrets of your existence, all the divine love for you, and your unique purpose in life. Then, just as God infuses your soul into your body, an assisting angel presses your mouth shut and instructs your soul to forget its preternatural life.

You are now spending your time on earth seeking to know once again the God who created you, loves you, and assigns you a singular purpose. Raise your forefinger to feel the crease mark the angel left above your lips, and ask yourself in wonder: "Who am I? How am I uniquely called to live in the world?"

The authors of the five titles in this Vocations series tell how they approached these same questions as they searched for meaning and purpose in their Christian vocation, whether as a brother, a married couple, a priest, a single person, or a sister.

Christians believe that God creates a dream for each person. What is your dream in life? This is how Pope John Paul II, echoing Jeremiah 1:5, speaks of the Creator's dream and the divine origin of your vocation:

All human beings, from their mothers' womb, belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos

and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the “book of life.” (*Evangelium Vitae*, no. 61)

In spite of believing that God does have your specific vocation in mind, you probably share the common human experience—the tension and the mystery—of finding out who you are and how God is personally calling you to live in this world. Although you can quickly recognize the uniqueness of your thumbprint, you will spend a lifetime deciphering the full meaning of your originality.

There is no shortage of psychological questionnaires for identifying your personality type, career path, learning style, and even a compatible mate. Although these methods can be helpful in your journey to self-discovery, they do little to illuminate the mystery in your quest. What is the best approach to knowing your vocation in life? Follow the pathway as it unfolds before you and live with the questions that arise along the way.

The stories in this Vocations series tell about life on the path of discernment and choice; they remind you that you are not alone. God is your most present and patient companion. In the “travelogues” of these authors, you will find reassurance that even when you relegate the Divine Guide to keeping ten paces behind you, or when you abandon the path entirely for a time, you cannot undo God’s faithfulness to you. Each vocation story uniquely testifies to the truth that God is always at work revealing your life’s purpose to you.

In these stories you will also find that other traveling companions—family, friends, and classmates—contribute to your discovery of a place in the world and call forth the person you are becoming. Their companionship along the way not only manifests God’s abiding presence but also reminds you to respect others for their gifts, which highlight and mirror your own.

Although each path in the Vocations series is as unique as the person who tells his or her story, these accounts remind you to be patient with the mystery of your own life, to have confidence in God’s direction, and to listen to the people and events you encounter as you journey to discover your unique role in God’s plan. By following your path, you too will come to see the person of tomorrow who lives in you today.

Clare vanBrandwijk



Introduction

A Marriage, Not Just a Wedding

When we told our parents that we had been asked to write a book about Catholic marriage, their reaction was pretty much what you would expect from the people who had raised us and taught us by their example most of what we know about being Catholic and being married: they laughed. It wasn't a mean laugh; we think they were just amused at the idea that a couple with a mere dozen years of experience with this thing called marriage might be ready to impart advice on the topic. The experience of our parents notwithstanding, we took comfort in the knowledge that this book would be aimed primarily at young people—for whom twelve years sounds like more than half a lifetime (and rightly so).

We do not claim to be experts on the subject, other than that we have some experience (twelve years each with marriage, thirty-some with Catholicism). We are not marriage counselors, although we have helped and counseled couples preparing for marriage. We are not psychologists (actually one of us is, but not the kind that specializes in marriage issues). We are not theologians who know the intricacies of Catholic church doctrine on the sacrament of marriage, although we think we know the basics.

What we are is a couple trying to live our wedding vows every day. By sharing our experiences with young people, we hope to help them prepare for what lies ahead, whether they consider marriage as a vague concept in the distant future (like parenthood, mutual funds, and retirement) or have already set the date for the ceremony.

Before looking at a marriage that lies ahead, however, perhaps you ought to determine *whether* married life is for you. Although the majority of people in our culture do get married, a significant minority do not. After careful discernment, some people determine that their call is to enter religious life. Others discern that neither married life nor religious life is right for them.

The mistake that many people make, to the constant annoyance of those who are single, is to assume that all unmarried people wish they were married—and would be if they found “the right person.” For many happily single people, the right person is themselves. Most of the single people we know have larger circles of friends, spend more time with them, and are able to devote more of their energy to causes such as social justice than the married people we know. They tend to give of themselves in ways that married people often cannot. Although single people at one time or another may envy the emotional intimacy that married couples share, married people sometimes may resent the balance of sociability and solitude that singles enjoy.

We suggest another thing to note about this book: it is not intended to convince you that you ought to get married. Although we love our marriage, we know that marriage is not for everyone. This book will help you determine whether married life is right for you.

*A wedding is an event;
a marriage is a process.*

The title of this introduction highlights the distinction between a wedding and a marriage: a wedding is an event; a marriage is a process. Traditionally, a wedding is when friends and family gather to celebrate as the couple pledge their love for each other, before those present and before God, and mark the beginning of their life together. It is a sacred event and a fun one, to be sure; Jesus performed his first public miracle at a wedding, and he did it so that those celebrating the sacred event could continue to have fun.

Some weddings are more private than others; some couples elope. Whether a wedding is shared by four people or four hundred, it is a commencement of sorts. A new life begins. The vows that the couple take do more than fill the time between “We are gathered here today” and “You may now kiss the bride.” In reciting these vows, the woman and the man promise to each other, to their families and friends, and to God that they will be together for the rest of their life. They acknowledge that with this promise they are becoming something different than what they were before. They were two lives, but now they are one. Even our language recognizes the uniqueness of this relationship: “They begin their life together,” rather than the more grammatically sensible, “They begin their lives together.” It is this life that we will focus on in this book: the marriage, the lifelong process that happens after the guests have gone home, the pictures are in the album, and the credit card bill from the honeymoon is due.

The Wedding Industry

Popular culture has a lot to say about weddings. There are magazines, such as *Bride's Magazine* and *Modern Bride*, devoted to preparing for the wedding day, including the omnipresent “bride's checklist.” There are bridal showers, bridal shops, and even massive bridal expos that gather under one roof providers of gowns, cakes, and music, as well as caterers and travel agencies, to sell their wares and services to couples-to-be. It is also common to see in general magazines for young women articles about weddings, as well as about identifying and attracting a mate.

Notice these two interesting things about the bridal industry: First, it is massive, especially when compared to the relatively small marriage industry, which consists primarily of books about maintaining or restoring a happy marriage, counseling for married couples in trouble, and jewelers happy to sell anniversary rings.

Second, a glance at wedding-related publications, businesses, and services reveals that they are overwhelmingly geared toward brides. There are no *Modern Groom* magazines, groom shops, or “groomal expos,” nor is there such a word as *groomal*. Men’s magazines, although filled with ideas about how males can make themselves more physically attractive and illustrated with pictures of physically attractive women, contain precious little information about how to identify and attract a wife and even less on how to be a good husband. Given that today’s culture promotes marriage among women and discourages it among men, it is no wonder that there is plenty of confusion and miscommunication. When we were younger, we witnessed the worldwide television event of the late Princess Diana’s supposed Fairy-tale Wedding. We never heard once about Prince Charles’s Fairy-tale Wedding. Wasn’t he there, too?

Imagine an archaeologist from another planet who comes to earth sometime in the future and studies the relevant artifacts of today. The alien might have this to say about weddings and marriage in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century:

Marriage was an institution engaged in by most of the humans of this period. The marriage was preceded by a period of preparation called an engagement, when the female (called the bride) was expected to develop a “checklist.” This checklist was a kind of test that had to be completed before the wedding would be allowed to take place. It included items like “select gown,” “choose reception site,” “pick DJ,” “select photographer,” “choose cake,” “choose bridesmaids’ gowns,” “borrow something for wedding,” “remind groom to identify groomsmen,” and “attend expo.” I found no evidence that the groom had any such checklist. The wedding was the event wherein the couple promised each other that they would remain married for the rest of their life. A honeymoon often followed that had been arranged at a bridal expo. Details on the actual marriages are not available, other than that

about half of them ended considerably earlier than the previously agreed-upon time frame (see Divorce).

Contemporary culture encourages too much wedding preparation and not enough marriage preparation. The result is much unnecessary stress over weddings and a lot of unhappy marriages. Notice that you never hear much about Princess Diana’s Fairy-tale *Marriage*; in fact, it seems that it was not a fairy tale at all. Many young couples fail to realize (at the expense of their own happiness) that in the long run it is much more important to agree on how to raise their children, how to deal with relocating to another part of the country, and how to spend their vacation time than it is to negotiate the colors of the bridal party, the china pattern in the gift registry, and the choice of serving beef or chicken at the reception.

*If couples spent as much time
preparing for marriage as for the
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than it is.*

Chances are that if couples spent as much time preparing for marriage as for the wedding, the divorce rate would be lower than it is. We hope that this book makes some small contribution to balancing the scales toward long-term marriage planning.

Fortunately, the Catholic church requires that couples entering the sacrament of marriage attend marriage-preparation meetings, classes, or retreats—often called pre-Cana experiences. (Because Jesus performed his first public miracle at a wedding in Cana, *pre-Cana* means “before the wedding.”) We have served as marriage-preparation counselors for our parish, working with couples on an inventory called “Prepare” (by David H. Olsen, David G. Fournier, and John M. Druckman). On this useful tool,

the bride- and groom-to-be record their opinions and beliefs about topics like money management, religious practices, child rearing, leisure activities, and career expectations. They compare their opinions with those of their prospective mate, and the counselors work with them on those areas where discrepancies exist. By working through these issues beforehand (with a more experienced pair to guide them), the couple stand a much better chance of dealing effectively with the speed bumps along the road to happiness in their own marriage.

The Wedding Ceremony

Before describing the layout of this book, we would like to get right to the most important part—the ritual of the marriage ceremony, which provides the basis for the book’s format.

Although a couple may modify or personalize their marriage vows, they must include certain elements in a Catholic marriage ceremony. First, the priest asks the couple several questions to establish that they are participating freely and know what they are getting into. Second, the bride and groom give their consent: they state their feelings for each other and make their vows. Third, they exchange rings as an outward symbol of their feelings for each other and for the marriage they are entering.

On our own wedding day, we used standard vows. We were lucky to have our friend and campus minister from college, Fr. Conrad Kratz, OPraem, celebrate our wedding Mass. As part of the Catholic Rite of Marriage, he asked us, “Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?” We answered, “Yes.” Then he questioned each of us: “Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?” We replied, “Yes.” Then he asked us, “Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” (This portion may be omitted in the case of older couples or in special circumstances.) Again, we said, “Yes.”

We then joined right hands and promised each other, “I, Andrew, take you, Amy, to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times

and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.” Then, “I, Amy, take you, Andrew, to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.”

Fr. Conrad then said, “You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide.”

He took and blessed the rings, and we placed them on each other’s finger, saying, “Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.” We actually screwed this part up, and one of us ended up with the ring on the wrong hand, but Fr. Conrad assured us that it counted nonetheless. We then got to kiss each other for the first time as a married couple.

Looking again at these vows, we are struck by their simplicity, beauty, and profundity. Every couple who go through this rite say to each other, “I love and trust you so much that I’m giving myself to you freely.” Within this context of freedom of choice, they express to each other something about what is inside them, what they feel: love and fidelity. They make a pledge of what they will do: love, honor, and be true. They say *when* they will do and feel these things: all the days of our life. Notice that they do not say, “From now on or for the rest of our life.” They are more specific than that. Which days do they have to do these things? *All the days: every single day.*

Consider this statement for a minute. Think of the things you do every single day. The list is pretty small: you breathe. Sure, you eat and sleep on most days, but there are occasions when you are too sick to eat or too troubled to sleep. This is not an option insofar as your love, honor, and fidelity toward your spouse are concerned. You cannot say, “Sorry, honey, I just don’t feel up to honoring you today,” or, “I’m so preoccupied with this crisis at work that I don’t have any energy left for fidelity. Check back next week.”

*You do not
take vacations from marriage.*

You do not take vacations from marriage. You are to love, honor, and be true to your spouse “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health.” On your wedding day, you essentially choose freely, before God and the church, to promise your spouse that from this moment forth you will be a different person, one who not only breathes every day but also loves, honors, and is true to your spouse *every day*.

The Format of This Book

This book is intended to help you focus on these wedding vows and see how they provide the context within which all other marriage issues exist. Marriage vows, when lived daily, sustain a relationship through the challenges that life presents. Each chapter title is from the Catholic Rite of Marriage. Over the course of these chapters, we describe how we and other couples we know live these vows every day *and* how these vows, which for the nervous couple-to-be may seem daunting or even impossible beforehand (especially in *sickness* and *bad* times), actually become the glue that binds the marriage together (*especially* in sickness and bad times). We will also describe the effect on our own life together when we forget to live these vows daily as we should (hint: it is not good).

*Marriage vows, when lived daily,
sustain a relationship
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Chapter 1—“Have You Come Here Freely and Without Reservation to Give Yourselves to Each Other in Marriage?”—focuses on preparing for marriage and realizing that marriage is the gift of yourself, given freely and without reservation, to your spouse. It looks at reasons for marriage and considers its benefits as well.

Chapter 2—“I Promise to Be True to You”—examines what it means to be true to your spouse and how couples live their marital fidelity and trustworthiness every day.

Chapter 3—“In Good Times and in Bad, in Sickness and in Health”—discusses some of the things that young couples preparing for marriage do not like to think about: sources of trouble in marriage and how commitment to your spouse can sustain marriage through the good and the bad.

Saint Paul said, “Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Chapter 4—“I Will Love You and Honor You”—looks at how love develops and grows over the course of a marriage. This chapter also considers the role of honor and mutual respect in marriage.

Finally, chapter 5—“All the Days of My Life”—talks about growing and changing together and looks at how life’s changes, such as childbirth, parenting, and aging, provide opportunities to live the wedding vows every day and expand them to include children.

We hope that by the time you finish this book, you will glimpse what married life is like, at least for some people, and that reading about our experiences and those of other married couples will develop in you a greater appreciation for Catholic marriage as it is being lived today. If you gain insight into how to deal effectively with or avoid problems that may arise in any marriage, we will have accomplished something worthwhile. For those of you who are getting ready to marry, we hope that reading this book will remind you to balance wedding plans with marriage plans, so that your happiness will last a lot longer than a day. As the wonderful, traditional Jewish wedding toast says, “May this day be the unhappiest day of your life!”