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Advice from voices of experience offered to newlyweds

The wedding season is upon us, so here is some good advice for engaged and newly married couples. This wisdom has been gathered from more than 70 experienced married couples from all over the diocese, who responded to the following question: "If you could offer one piece of advice to couples just beginning their marriage that would help them faithfully live their vows, what would be that advice?"



To start with, it is very obvious that virtually all of the responding couples believe that faith is the most important element in a successful marriage. Here are some examples of their advice on the significance of faith in marriage: "Put God #1 and each other #2;" "Put God before your spouse. Develop a relationship with Him first;" "Live first for their faith and let their marriage revolve around that;" and "Keep God at the head of the family always."

A related theme to putting God first was the concept that marriage is a partnership with God. Couples expressed recommendations such as: "Let God be your partner, too;" "Keep God as your trusting partner and ask for His help continually;" "Have mutual respect for each other and reverence for God. Always remember that it is a union of 3;" and "Spend time with scripture to understand how precious the marriage is to God and how much God wants to participate in it."

It would be no surprise that our experienced married couples emphasized the need for prayer in marriage. Some sample responses are: "Begin the marriage with a focus on helping each other increase their faith. Learn to pray about every decision;" "Pray together – good example means more than words;" "Get into the habit of praying together and practicing your faith together. The rest will fall into place;" and, from a couple married 53 years, "Pray together, give and take, share. Always do things as a family. Attend Mass together often."

With regard to the kind of commitment to one another that is required of spouses, the couples made the following recommendations: "Never take your love for granted. It needs care and cultivation to flourish and endure;" "Remember that you can best reflect God's intimate love for your spouse. No one can hurt your spouse more deeply. Few can bring your spouse more joy;" and "Don't let emotions cloud the long-term view. Vow for the marriage to really be a sacrament, a visible sign of God's presence in the world."

Good communication is a key aspect of married life. On this point, our experienced couples offered these observations: "Listen, truly listen to each other and fulfill the promise to always be faithful;" "Communicate what you want and what you expect from your spouse and what your spouse wants and expects from you;" and "Communicate to the other your feelings. Accept that you could be wrong and let go of resentment."

The veteran married couples also emphasized the liberating power of forgiveness. As one couple said, "Learn how to truly forgive someone's actions and learn to communicate if someone's actions hurt you. Don't attack the person; attack the behavior." Another couple stated that marriage requires "Unfailing commitment to love and unwavering forgiveness for failures." A similar observation was this one: "Remember always: No one person is perfect and always be ready to forgive even if the other person is holding a grudge." Several respondents quoted the passage from Ephesians, "Do not let the sun set on your anger."

To me, as someone who has been married for almost 33 years, the advice given by the couples in the diocesan survey is pure gold. So many couples think that faith is not practical, but, when it comes to marriage, faith is the most practical thing there is. God invented marriage, and He sustains it. The advice from over 70 happily married couples confirms this. We thank them for sharing their insights.

Our closing quote is from C. S. Lewis and appears in one of the responses to the survey on marriage: "Love, as distinct from being in love, is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit, and reinforced by the grace which both partners ask for, and receive, from God. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run. Being in love was the explosion that started it."