

FROM THE PASTOR'S



**Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2009 B**

TEN SUGGESTIONS FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

The word love is used nine times in today's second reading and nine times in the gospel. The challenge for every married couple is to keep love alive in their marriage. The following article by Geri Hess Mitsch, offers ten suggestions for a better marriage. Read the suggestions and if you have good communication with your spouse, you may wish to discuss the reflection questions.

Whether you got married last year or 35 years ago, it always helps to be reminded of the little things that make for day-to-day marital joy. Here are 10 practical tips for couples everywhere.

Keep some of the engagement courtesies alive in your marriage.

John, my husband, has a reputation as a businessman of being extremely polite to his customers and employees. He carries this into our marriage. He still opens the car door for me. Of course I could open it myself but that would deprive him of the chance to say by his actions, "I cherish you." Nor have we allowed "Please" and "Thank you" to go out of style. I still feel a lilt in my spirits when he says, "That was a good meal. Darling."

Respect your mate's ideas and decisions.

During the years when I taught school, I had some extremely creative students. Oftentimes their ideas appeared "far out". If I pounced on them without hearing them out, a light went out of their eyes. They withdrew and shut me out. There is a lesson here for marriage. How much better to hear your partner out instead of retorting, "That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard." You may be pleasantly surprised by what good things the two of you can create out of a "dumb idea" as you talk things over. Learning to *listen-really listen*—to your mate is hard work and it is always a manifestation of love.

Speak as politely to your spouse as you would to a stranger.

One cold morning the doorbell rang at 4 am. There stood a young man who was having car trouble and needed to use our telephone. My husband and I were both impressed with his politeness. When he called his wife, however his abusive language served to only

antagonize her. If he had been as polite with his wife as he was to us, he would have saved both himself and her a lot of unnecessary aggravation.

4. Learn to confront your partner with loving regard for his or her feelings.

It's amazing how many things we can do to make a confrontation more productive. Just the way we phrase our sentence has an effect on the other person. Instead of "YOU left the milk out last night!" say, "The milk was left out last night." The reminder is there without bashing your spouse over the head. It is rewarding to see how much more receptive my husband is when I approach him "with the heart to help" rather than the ego-fed, superior stance. When you think a confrontation is necessary, ask yourself these questions: Am I confronting my mate to get my own way? To "get it back" on him or her? Or truly to work out a situation to improve relations between us?

5. Learn to respect mate's privacy.

In *The Prophet*, Kahil Gibran said, "Let there be spaces in your togetherness." Shortly after we were married, my husband said to me, "Geri, there are times when I need to be alone. Please don't feel I am neglecting you when I go to my den and leave you sitting here." What a masterstroke of communication! I didn't have to wonder if I had offended him, or if he wanted to get away from me for some unknown reason. I had no need to pout or feel sorry for myself. Instead I used our time apart creatively for myself.

6. Learn to keep priorities straight.

Something that has been helpful to me in our marriage is to ask, "Would another woman be bothered by this?" If not, then maybe it is my problem, not my husband's. Thinking like this helps not to "major in minor" over petty things. It is also important not to let the "busy-ness" of our lives get in the way of time for each other. Having meals together, dining out at a special restaurant and taking an enjoyable vacation for just the two of you will help you keep each other as your top priority!

7. Master your finances rather than letting them master you.

John knew what it was like to have downturns in his business. Consequently, he learned to do without things, including regular vacations, and to postpone purchases,

which he could not afford at the time. Because I had taught in private schools on a “dedicated salary,” I too knew what it was to do without, to say “No” to sales, and live within my income. Today, except for large purchases such as a car or house, we use our one credit card only for purchases which we can pay off by the end of the month.

Our money is “ours,” not “yours” or “mine”. If an extra-large purchase is to be made, this is discussed first. We also have what we call our “kitchen bank” - a specific cookbook where we stash away petty cash. Either of us has ready access to it at any time. This frees us from the humiliating pettiness of having to ask the other for cash for haircut or a few groceries.

8. Make a conscious effort to grow, intellectually and emotionally.

As a teacher, I had to take refresher courses to keep my teaching alive and fresh. John was constantly talking with colleagues and seeking new ways to improve his business. In much the same way marriage can be improved by making an attempt *to improve*. Growing up is hard and doesn’t happen without constant effort. It’s a sad sight to see a woman pout like a little child because she doesn’t get her way—or to watch a husband slam the door and leave the house in a display of uncontrolled anger. Each month I try to read at least one article or chapter in a book on enriching my marriage. Sometimes I get a new insight, like the time M. Scott Peck stabbed me into the awareness that I, at times, have been good to people in order to get them to do what I wanted. That is a subtle form of deception. Such action seeks to manipulate the other person. Oftentimes, however, it’s not so much something new we need as it is being jolted into awareness that we have failed to do what we know we should be doing.

9. Find ways to keep love alive.

One Valentine’s Day I opened the kitchen drawer to find a candy “I love you” heart. But that was only the beginning. All day long, in unexpected places throughout the house, I discovered more candy hearts. Your ability to say, “I love you” is limited only by your imagination. Notes in lunch sacks; expressions of gratitude for a loving deed placed on your spouse’s desk or sent in the mail; an unexpected IOU for something which you know would please your loved one; a note of “I’m glad I married you” tucked in a suitcase before your spouse goes to work—all bring a lift to the spirit.

10. Treasure the moments you have together.

I am suffering my second bout with cancer. The future is uncertain. We sense that the fragile thread of life is slipping through our fingers. Not knowing its

length, we savor our days together. How much time do you have with your loved one? You, too, do not know the length of your span of life. A sudden accident, an illness, any number of things could snatch one of you away. My words of encouragement to you: Bring the best of everything you’ve experienced into your marriage. Then treasure the beauty of your days together, enriched by your day-to-day acts of love.

Reflection questions

I realize many couples find it hard to openly discuss articles like the above. If your spouse is unwilling to discuss it, you could act on the article by taking *one* of the suggestions and working it in *your* life. Quietly improving our own performance is often the best way to motivate a spouse, friend, or relative to improve theirs.

If you have a pretty open marriage you could take time to go through each of the suggestions and share how you feel you are doing with each one.

Those of you who are married know very well marriage is hard work and sometimes-painful work. Taking time to discuss openly and in a non-judgmental way articles like the above one is part of the hard work of marriage.

Another way to “work” this article is for you, as a couple, to write out your *Ten* (or three or seven) *Suggestions For a Better Marriage*. I have absolutely no doubt lots of wisdom exist in our parish. I’d love to hear from you. Or, maybe you can share with me a great article you have read on marriage.

Finally, share the article with other dating or married couples. By doing so you are expressing your concern for another’s relationship. As *Marriage Encounter* folk remind us: “we all have a stake in each other’s marriage.” We should always be ready to help other couples succeed, *and* to do it in a caring and non-intrusive way.

Have a blessed week,

