

## Our Love is Here to Stay

Catholic writer Dolores Curran once cracked wise about the difficulty facing parishes seeking to offer help to married couples. Just imagine the announcement, she said: “All those in troubled marriages are invited to meet in the rectory on Thursday night at 7:30.”

While the all-absorbing years of parenting march inexorably toward the moment of the child’s departure, living with a spouse for 40 or 50 years is truly the long haul. Yet compared to the torrents of advice on how best to parent a child physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, we see no comparable onslaught for those committed to maintaining a good marriage. Often, in fact, we appear locked in a conspiracy of silence, refusing to even acknowledge those easy-to-predict rough patches that every marriage reliably goes through. While parents will cheerfully detail to one another their children’s antisocial behaviors and potty training failures, married friends seldom casually ask, “So, how’s your marriage going?” Announcements of divorce often arrive as bolts from the blue.

I remember somewhere around the 8-year-mark, my husband and I told a priest friend of ours how we were ready to kill each other (in the figurative sense, at least most of the time). “Well, they always say that seven to ten years of marriage are considered the desert years,” he said. What a relief. He blessed us and told us to hold fast, which we did.

In the February U.S. Catholic, ethicist Julie Hanlon Rubio notes the lack of inspiring cultural stories (movies, books, TV shows) about the depth that comes from commitment in marriage. “It’s all about romance and beginnings,” she says. “We need to tell the stories of what a lifelong commitment is like from the inside, so we can uphold that. Who can know you well enough, and who can challenge you also to be your better self? You can come back again and again and keep trying to get it right. There is something about the commitment holding you fast, to give you that time to work and deepen your relationship.”

Some parishes offer marriage nights, talks on the theology of the body, perhaps a Valentine Mass to renew your vows, or invitations to Marriage Encounter, a weekend where leader couples speak about the daily realities of marriage and teach couples to reflect, write, and dialogue about their marriage.

But much of the initiative for marriage enrichment falls to couples themselves. Consider these:

- A regular date night, something my husband and I have stuck to in all the years of our marriage. “Isn’t it something,” he said last Saturday, “that the best part of my week is sitting here in a restaurant talking to my wife?”

- An occasional weekend away to renew your acquaintance beyond discussions of children, scheduling, and money—the “roommates raising children” syndrome that can set in after a while.
- The excellent resources on [smartmarriages.com](http://smartmarriages.com), including a directory of marriage education classes by state to help couples learn the stages of marriage and skills to manage the predictable challenges along the way. (Aware of the fear factor, they pitch the classes as “drivers’ education for marriage.”) [Marriagefriendlytherapists.com](http://Marriagefriendlytherapists.com) can recommend a marriage counselor who is committed to keeping the marriage together (because many counselors are not).
- And the basics: Pray for each other. Say “thanks” and “I love you” every day.

—by Catherine O’Connell-Cahill, from the pages of [At Home with Our Faith](#), Claretian Publications’ print newsletter for parents on nurturing spirituality in the home. Winner of the 2010 and 2011 General Excellence award from the Catholic Press Association. Here’s a [sample issue](#).