

MARRIAGE TIPS OF THE MONTH!

All tips are written by Teresa Hartnett, Director of Family Ministry for the Diocese of Hamilton. Contact at 905-528-7988 ext. 2250, or thartnett@hamiltondiocese.com

Tip - There are three essential components of successful marriages: the ability to communicate effectively; a commitment to longevity, depth and growth; and an ability to resolve conflict. Each of these components require skills which, when learnt, become the keys to a lasting marriage. Taking the time to improve your skills in these areas will result in a continual renewal of your relationship and the ability to persevere through times of stress.

Tip - In every couple relationship there are two rhythms, one belonging to each spouse. Some people are slow-walkers who like to stroll through life, others are quick-steppers who like to keep up a fast pace. When two spouses have different rhythms, big strains in the relationship can occur, especially if one spouse expects the other to match their own style. We should learn to love and celebrate both our own rhythm, and that of our loved one, but we must also learn to accept that our spouse may not want to walk at the same pace we enjoy. So, use compromise and learn to understand, not fight, the rhythms of those you love.

Tip - As Catholics we are called to an understanding of marriage that goes beyond the secular definition and is understood as Sacrament. Therefore, married couples are called to be a sign of God's unconditional love for each of us, by the way they embody unconditional love for each other. Even when stress and conflict make their way into our lives, we are called to make sacred the ordinary. Stop and ask if your words and actions are reflecting Christ. If the answer is no, then change your response until you can honestly answer "yes"!

Tip - It is easy to let all the responsibilities of marriage and family overtake our time and energy as a couple. To be sure to give time to your couple relationship, schedule at least one hour a week to do something fun with your spouse. Sharing fun activities together each week can be enough to get you through the more stressful times that will inevitably come along.

Tip - Compliment and criticism: two words, each with a lot of power. The first word is positive, the second one destructive. Keep track for a couple of days of the number of times you do both. If the balance is in favour of compliments, good; if not, you may need to change your communication style. Research has shown that chronic criticism in a relationship is the number one reason for break-ups. Try going on a no-criticism diet for a day and see how much calmer and happier your relationship can be.

Tip #6 - As a couple journeys through life together, there will be inevitable changes that occur. These changes may be physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, mental, or

perhaps, a combination of one or more of these. In order for these changes to be a positive component of a relationship, couples need to stay open to change in their partner, discuss these changes and embrace them with an attitude of acceptance.

Tip - Mother Teresa wrote, 'Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within the reach of everyone.' Marriage allows each person in a couple relationship to experience the sweet fruit of love and caring each day they share with their spouse. Do you nourish the seeds of love in your relationship? Can you reach out to each other as a couple and find the nourishment you need? Love is precious, be sure you take care of it and you will reap a beautiful harvest.

Tip – Sometimes we can get so caught up in the 'stuff' of life that we forget to take the time to continue to discover the person we love. Remember the first days of love and the hours you spent talking and getting to know each other? No matter how long you have been together, it is important to continue the discovery. Take some time and ask each other these questions: What makes you happiest in our relationship? What is one thing you would like to change in our relationship? Listen with an open mind and you may discover something new about your spouse.

Tip – Christmas is fast approaching and the decision about what gift to buy for a spouse can cause some stress. Take the stress out of gift giving, and perhaps your marriage, by giving a gift that will keep on giving. Plan twelve dates, one for each month in the next year. Think about a dinner out, a walk in the woods, a movie, a shared coffee at a special restaurant, an evening at an upcoming play at a local theatre, or other simple moments that might bring you both some pleasure. Write them out on your own 'gift certificate' and spend the next twelve months enjoying the gift of each others company. It might just be the best gift you've ever given or received!

Tip – When we value something we take extra care to ensure it will last. When it comes to our cars and houses we do regular maintenance on both, not only because they are important to us, but because we want them to work as efficiently as possible. **Marriage is your most valuable asset** and it deserves some maintenance too! Read a book on relationships together; seek counselling if there are major issues between you; learn how to communicate positively so your marriage continues to grow; consider attending a marriage enrichment evening sometime this year. A good start might be attending the upcoming Marriage Encounter Weekend to be held April 21/22, 2007. Our marriages deserve some maintenance too, how will you care for yours?

Tip - Communication requires a willingness to listen to each other and the ability to resolve conflicts by being open to compromise. Sometimes, even the best relationships can fall into the "need to be right" trap. This need to be right can build up walls between a couple, as the person needing to be right can no longer see the other's point of view or needs. This is a marriage stressor, so ask yourself, "Do I want to be right, or do I want to be loved and loving?"

Tip - Much of our lives involve tasks that will ensure those things of value to us are well looked after. How many of us take >real= time to Apay attention to@ or Agive time to@

focus just on our marriage? Your marriage can be whatever you want it to be, if you are willing to ensure it receives regular check ups and maintenance!

Tip - Faith and marriage are connected and we have the research to prove it! Couples who share a faith and who practice their faith together report much more satisfying relationships and have a greater chance of staying together than those who do not. Be sure you use this information to help your marriage thrive: pray together at meals and before you go to sleep; attend mass together; attend a faith based workshop together; share and discuss a daily reflection. With God as a central part of your marriage you will find great support and protection.

Tip - Dr. Willard Harley, a noted psychologist and author, when looking for the key to love in marriage, found that it is all about deposits in our love bank. When we associate good feelings with a person, we deposit 'love notes', but when we associate bad feelings with that person, we withdraw love notes. In the early stages of a relationship, both people make lots of deposits and as a result fall in love. All too often, after a few years or more of marriage we begin to make too many withdrawals: we stop complimenting each other; we criticize each other in public; we spend less time together as a couple as children arrive. Romantic love changes because we forget to make love deposits. The largest deposits in our love banks occur when we have our emotional needs met. Try making some deposits into your spouses love bank and you will reap some great rewards!

Tip - We all want marriages that are strong, fulfilling and happy. One way to help this happen is to celebrate your marriage. Take some time to remember what is good and to bring it to the forefront of your thinking. Here are a few ideas: tell your spouse you love them every day; give a "just-because" gift; toast each other with a glass of wine or champagne; get your picture taken, just the two of you; walk holding hands; meet someplace dressed up. Little things can go a long way in reminding ourselves that love is right before our eyes!

Tip – Everyday we make choices about how we will respond in the world in which we live. We are careful to keep control and act in a certain manner when we are at work and out in public. Today make the decision to act lovingly toward your spouse, the person with whom you are sharing your life. Decide to say something nice; overlook an annoying habit; make a point of complimenting them on something nice they do for you; recognize their love for you; share a smile or a touch; offer to take a moment to hear about their day.

Tip – Love is a choice and we are called to live our choice in a positive manner and as a verb! To do this it is important to remember, especially at difficult moments, that when we married we each said, "I do" and committed ourselves to one another. So "do": think before you speak, compliment often and say "I love you" daily; it will be good for both of you!

Tip – The greatest gift we can give our spouse is the gift of true love: total commitment, trust, caring, compassion, understanding, joy and support. At Christmas time, give the gift of love to your spouse in a way that will last all year. Plan a special monthly date, commit to writing a card or note to your loved one several times throughout the year, promise to tell your spouse one good thing they have done for you each and every day,

commit to doing one small thing daily to make your spouse smile, attend mass together weekly, pray together at least once a day. These are all small gifts with great power: the power to rekindle and maintain love.

Tip – As the New Year begins we often make resolutions for making our lives better. This year why not resolve to view your actions in a manner that will help put your spouse's needs at the forefront of your relationship. Ask what you can give to your relationship, instead of what your relationship can give to you. Everyone will be happier!

Tip – Marriage Teaches Love: Our relationship is teaching our children the most important lessons of their lives - how to love, how to disagree, how to forgive, how to grow together, how to live. God gives us the grace to be the best teachers we can be. Our children are watching; what do they see?

Tip – Marriage in the Catholic Church is a sacrament: our love for each other is to mirror the love of God for each person. It is good now and then to reflect on our marriages and discern whether they truly reflect the total love and giving of God's love. It is not easy, but love is a choice and the decision to love can and should influence how we treat our spouse.

Tip – Children are a beautiful extension of our marriages. They are certainly a blessing, but meeting their needs naturally changes our couple relationship. During these important years never forget to take time for each other. One of the best gifts we can give our children is a strong, loving marriage.

Tip – In spring we move outdoors to revitalize our lawns and gardens. Take the time to nurture and revitalize your relationship as well by asking, "What did we do for each other today?" Turning to one another and asking the question helps us to grow as a couple.

Tip – Leaving a Legacy: Marriages that have lasted over the long haul allow generations to look back and grow forward. They are living examples of what it means to have lasting love; they give hope. Marriage is at the heart of family, so celebrate your marriage milestones!

Tip – Communication - the key is to make it an on-going part of your relationship. Sharing news, complimenting each other and discussing issues as they arise keeps us connected and prevents difficulties from piling up and becoming more difficult to resolve. Regular communication is a great maintenance plan for your marriage!

Tip – Conflict resolution is a necessary part of every relationship. It can be positive instead of negative when we forgive our spouses easily and when we readily admit that we have made a mistake. The goal should always be to resolve the issue between us and get back to being happy!

Tip – Love can be shown in many ways. Take a few moments to write down a few traits that you appreciate about your spouse and then take the time to share them. Your spouse will feel your love through your words and so will you!

Tip – The first language we learn is a language without words, an important part of how we communicate emotions throughout our lives – it is the language of touch. Evidence suggests it can lead to an immediate change in how people think and behave. Touch conveys love, caring

and a message of closeness. So, touch your spouse's hand, give a little shoulder rub, embrace with a little hug and see how it can fill your hearts.

Tip– The month of November is a month of remembrance and gives us the opportunity to remember those who have gone before us. This is a perfect time to focus on the reality that our time together is precious. Be with each other and rejoice in moments shared!

Tip– Give your spouse the best gift of all this Christmas ...Life-long loving requires that we say to our spouse “Show me how to love you better.”

Tip– As the New Year begins, many people decide on resolutions to improve their lives. This year, why not focus on how to be a great spouse? Consider how you speak to and about each other. Work toward being positive partners. You'll enjoy spending time with each other when you are building each other up!

Tip– February is known as the month of love. The word is so easy to say, but its real meaning is held in the actions we connect to it: how committed we are to each other, the things we do for each other and how often we think of the needs of our spouse first. How did you say “I love you” today?

Tip– When God is a part of your marriage your marriage is stronger. Lent is a perfect time to connect intimately with both God and your spouse. Take the time to reflect, as a couple, on a short bible passage (either daily or weekly). Simply select a passage to read and then share with your spouse your reaction and thoughts around the words you have read. It can become an expression of love to both God and your spouse!

Tip– Spring cleaning is about revitalizing our hibernating homes. It's also a great time to refresh our marriages. Make the decision as a couple to spend some time together on a mini-date taking a walk or sharing a coffee; give your spouse some “guilt-free” time off from household duties; learn something new about your spouse (no matter how long you've been married!); tell your spouse why they are still special to you. Remember what it was like to be newly in love? This spring, feel that way all over again.

Tip– In Fall we assess our homes in preparation for the winter ahead. Why not take some time to prepare your relationship for those inevitable stormy moments which every relationship encounters? Spend some time together sharing future goals, go on a date and spend time together, or better still, consider signing up for a Marriage Encounter/Enrichment weekend (offered November 12/13) and reconnect in a way that will weather any storm. Spending time on your relationship is sure to boast a bountiful harvest.

Tip– In the fall we de-clutter – we look through our material goods, let go of things that are not useful and keep those we need and love. Sometimes relationships need to be de-cluttered too! Look closely at how you interact with your spouse: keep what is working, what connects you and what you love about your relationship and let go of the non-useful “stuff.” Are you in the habit of complaining, using sarcasm, acting moody, or spending too much time away from each other? Love is a choice; choose to de-clutter harmful actions and spend more time on those things that connect you and deepen your love

Family Tip for December - According to some customs, Advent is a time to reflect on the upcoming celebration of Christmas by lighting the candles of the Advent wreath and to focus each week on a different aspect of the season: hope, peace, joy and love. As a family, take some time after the events of Christmas (Mass, gift-giving, extended family gatherings and a big meal) to quietly reflect on these precious concepts in your own lives. Talk about the hope that our faith provides us in the everyday trials of life; discuss what it means to have true inner peace and our

call as Catholics to reconcile our differences with those closest to us; express your joy in being part of your immediate family and tell each person what they mean to you, then remind each other of the joy that comes from being part of God's family; speak to each other of God's deep love for us, exemplified by sending his Son to die for our sins and to unite us with him in eternity, then express how you show love each day to those in your family. Christmas is a time to create moments that draw us together as family; conversations deep in meaning will certainly do just that!

Tip– In the New Year we often take the time to set goals or resolutions for ourselves, ones that will improve us as a person. This is a great time to set some goals for who you will be in your married relationship. Make a resolution to determine little ways that you might be a better spouse: compliment; say I love you; help with a task you wouldn't normally do; plan a special date. Life is about choices and we can choose to be a better spouse for our loved one!

Tip– It is impossible to live life without experiencing personal crosses. Marriages are not immune to this reality, but we are not alone in bearing our crosses. The Grace provided in the sacraments helps to sustain us and Jesus came to show us how to navigate life, including times of difficulty. Lent is a time to reflect, as a couple, on the life of Jesus Christ, his sacrifice on the cross and his death and resurrection. The cross gives us hope for the future - as we face our own personal crosses, it gives us strength and hope to work through difficulties in our lives.

Tip– Although at times we may wish we could change our spouse, the truth is we can only really change ourselves. The good news is research proves that when one person makes the conscience decision to improve what they bring to their relationship, their partner cannot help but be changed as well. Is there an area of your marriage where you could be a better spouse? Working on that component can bring positive change to both of you.

Tip– The warmer days of spring prompt us to get outdoors to work and play at things we have not participated in during the colder days of winter. This is a great period to take the time to renew your commitment to work and play together as spouses. In the rush of everyday life, we can forget to take time to nurture, spend time with and connect more fully with the person we have committed to for life. Spring clean your relationship – you won't regret it!

Tip– Our faith tells us that God created us to be relational, but living in relationship can sometimes be a challenge. Research proves that true happiness comes from good relationships, both with God and others in our lives. The good news is we have control over what we bring to our couple bond; we control what we say and do. When we practise patience, constantly treat our spouse with respect and engage with each other using kindness as an unceasing tool, happiness will surround our couple relationship.

Tip– Summer often brings a little reprieve from the bustle of our busy lives. It's a great period to spend some extra time with your spouse reconnecting as a couple. Share a coffee in the early morning, read the same book and talk about its content, take daily walks together, spend some relaxed time preparing meals. Tranquil moments together reduce our stress and remind us that being together is both enjoyable and loving.

Tip– Angry words, spoken in the heat of the moment, can be emotionally scarring. When anger surfaces, the old adage "count to ten before you speak" is a good one to remember - it provides a buffer to calm the emotions. Anger is a normal emotion, but how and when it is expressed can result in a positive or negative relationship moment. Take a few seconds and ask yourself how you might best express your anger without leaving lasting marks on your love relationship.

Tip–Time **together** is the greatest protector for loving relationships, but often hard to realize because of busy lives. Experts believe that couples need to spend at least 15 hours per week together to truly realize the bonding and support intended by God from their marriages. When you said, “I do,” it included wanting to spend time with the one you love. Time together can be varied: exercise, take up a hobby, cook, attend Mass as a couple. Plan time together - you will feel happier, more relaxed and more in love!

Tip– Christmas can be a stressful time for couples trying to meet the demands of the season. Take a quiet moment, just the two of you, to ask each other what the most important part of the Christmas season is for each of you. When this is determined, you can easily negotiate how to change, cancel, or negotiate other obligations that are causing stress, so that you are in control. It will mean a more joyful season, with love filling the air, not words spoken in anger due to stress.

Tip– When arguments get out of control, the words spoken can be very damaging. They are words of anger and not words from the heart, so they leave a negative and lasting effect. In times of tension use these tips: learn to use a quiet voice; speak as though you are at work; take a break from the discussion and agree to talk about it later; learn to put “we” above “me” by speaking from the heart instead of the anger. Take some time to learn good communication skills so you can avoid resorting to words of anger. You will never regret speaking the truth in love.

Tip– Called to Forgive

The Easter season is a perfect time to remember that our faith calls us to forgiveness. Jesus’ rising from the dead provides us with an understanding that even in the darkest moments there is hope. Stepping beyond our hurt to calmly explain how we are feeling and offer forgiveness brings healing and peace to both our hearts and relationship. Holding on to anger and hurt damages our bond of love and deprives us of joy as a couple. Forgiveness – you will never regret giving or receiving it!

Tip - Experts tell us that we need to spend quality time with our spouse to gain the true connection that we seek with one we love. Taking a walking, reading a book together, eating a dinner together after the kids are in bed, asking what you did good today as a couple and what you could have done better at the end of the day – these are all ways to strengthen the love you share and uncover the feelings of dating that you once shared!

Tip– Love is a commitment, one that has bright days, gray days and everything in-between days. When we persevere and work through our struggles in positive ways, our relationship grows stronger and more resilient. When we understand that God is with us in our marriage, it reminds us that we are never alone. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (4:13) When we turn to God together in daily prayer, our love grows and deepens and is capable of handling any day that comes our way.

Tip– When we first fall in love it is difficult for anyone to point out the flaws in our “perfect” mate. Over time though, we become well aware of those less than perfect qualities! When we continue to see the good qualities that attracted us to each other, we can tolerate the imperfections, but if we focus on the negative we can become critical and dissatisfied. Take the time to focus on the good characteristics of the one you love – and tell them why you love that part of them. You will see a more positive person come forward.

Tip– Don’t miss out on words of encouragement, compliments and/or gratitude that your spouse speaks to you by putting up blocks to accepting these moments of emotional connection. Let down your shield and receive the caring words as they are intended and watch the closeness between the two of you grow.

Tip– The Three Dog Nights singing group had a hit that contained the following: “One is the loneliest number that you’ll ever know. Two can be as bad as one it’s the loneliest number since

the number one.” When it comes to marriage, coming together as two is not meant to be lonely, it is meant to be life-giving, joyful and a shared partnership. Talk as a couple and find out if loneliness is being experienced by one or both of you – don’t ignore the feelings. Plan to share on a more intimate level the “stuff” of life; spend time together engaging in activity; be specific about what you need so you will not feel lonely in your marriage – combatting loneliness is vital if you want to recapture the joy and meaning of your married relationship.

Tip– As Christmas approaches and the New Year draws close, it is a perfect time to think of the gift of love given to each other on the day you married. Is the gift still shiny and a joy to experience, or is it a bit dull, thought about only after so many other things are dealt with? This Christmas, give renewed love as a gift to your spouse - rekindled, joyful and desired. Take time to discern what you need to make that “newly married love” as much a gift today as it was the day you married.

Tip– Men and women are sometimes said to be as different as night and day and yet, those two times of the day are united, blending into each other, each providing something to the world. As husbands and wives we bring unique qualities to our relationships, blending together to make our own special union of love. Seeking to understand, accepting and embracing our differences and rejoicing in moments of similarity serve to create a relationship that is both confident and loving.

Tip– Marriage isn’t about the word I - it is about the words we and us. Most married couples understand this, but living it is not so simple. Love is an active word, requiring both partners to see themselves as one unit. It means constantly seeking what will be best for each person in your love union. With the help of God, celebrating your covenant daily is made possible. Love is about what you do for each other and how you step beyond yourself to live fully those most important words: we and us.

Tip– Marriage is never a static affair – life events, changing family situations and growing older all contribute to a relationship in motion! As you build your marriage, the foundation becomes solid and “bricks and mortar” are added, but don’t be fooled into believing the task is complete. Maintenance is what keeps marriages strong: spend time together; remember to speak words of love and appreciation; talk about what you are doing well and what you need to improve as a couple. When we continue to put effort into our marriages, the ride is filled with excitement and joy!

Tip– Our marriages are supposed to reflect, through our love for each other, how much God loves each person. Showing this Godly love can sometimes be a challenge, especially when our human selves are less than perfect! When we set our minds to consciously changing how we act, we can do better. Pope Francis encourages us to, “Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that makes your talents fruitful...do not be afraid to dream great things!” Dream great things for your marriage and your love will flourish as God intended!

Tip– Leftovers can be good, but most of us would not want to eat them every day! This is true when it comes to our married relationship as well. Occasional busy days or weeks may mean our spouse gets our leftover time, but when we make this the norm, our connection to each other starts to unravel. Time management ensures we accomplish what is necessary and important – make sure time with your spouse is a true priority.

Tip– Marriage means making daily decisions about who we will be in our relationship. We choose how to act and those choices have a profound impact on our loved one. We can choose to focus on traits in our partner that bother us, or we can choose to focus on those good, loving and particular qualities that drew us to our spouse. We can choose not to verbalize our expectations, or we can articulate our needs and openly discuss how as a couple we can strive to meet each

other's needs. We can choose to stay silent until we are calm and then discuss difficulties, or we can choose to act in anger and say things unintended. Love is a choice – good choices make for happier, healthier marriages. Choose well!

Tip– Time for ourselves as a couple can seem like a precious commodity, especially when we have young children. Time together though, engaging with each other, having fun, sharing moments for the two of us, strengthens the bonds a couple share and deepens our love. Not having enough time to spend together, just the two of you, is not an option – book yourselves some couple time and watch your love grow stronger and your attraction for each other deepen.

Tip– At the Synod in Rome, which wrapped up its deliberations on October 19, 2014, Pope Francis and more than 200 delegates discussed in detail the challenges faced by families in the world today. In their discussions they reminded us that we are not alone, that God is with us as we journey. Taking that message seriously can have a positive impact on your married relationship – attending Mass as a couple, praying together and even joining in parish events have proven benefits in producing happier marriages. God is with us – invite him in and see how his presence will have a constructive impact on your married life!

Tip– Christmas is a time of joy in families, but also a time of stress as we do too much, eat too much and spend too much! This year make Christmas truly special by slowing things down just a little. Spend some time together, just the two of you; tell your spouse why you see them as a gift all year long. Express your love to your spouse – knowing how you feel about them and why you feel that way may be the greatest gift they will receive.

Tip– In marriage we can sometimes focus on the habits of our spouse that annoy us, rather than looking inward at ourselves and asking how we might be a better partner to the one we love. Ask yourself what one thing you can do today to be a better spouse and then do it; choose a new item to focus on each week. As we change how we connect with our spouse, their response to us will also change and suddenly, life is better. Adopt a new way of acting toward your spouse and watch your marriage thrive!

Tip– If someone asked you what qualities a person needs to be a good spouse, there is no doubt that you would be able to name several. So ask yourself, “Do I engage these same qualities in my own marriage?” Marriage is the foundation of a family and as a couple it is up to each spouse to make the foundation strong. Do you expect as much from yourself as you do from your spouse? Have you asked your spouse what you can do better? Have we practised love in action?

Tips– As spring arrives most people move outdoors and observe their living quarters from a different vantage point. They discard any garbage that has accumulated over the winter, pull weeds, turn the soil over, spread fertilizer and plant flowers, all so they can enjoy their gardens as the summer months unfold. It is good now and then to do the same kind of maintenance on your marriage. Take the time to sit down and have a discussion about what bad habits, poor communication, or other actions have accumulated in your marriage that are acting as excess garbage. Discuss ways of discarding the old habits and discern ways to move forward so that together you can plant new methods of being, speaking and loving each other. Big or small changes can result in healthier connections, allowing you to truly enjoy the summer and autumn of your relationship!

Tips– Life is not perfect and neither are we, which means that in every relationship there will be moments when things go wrong. When these times occur we can discuss what is wrong and find a solution to the situation, or we can tap into the “blame game” by attributing the problem to our spouse's behaviour, a character weakness within them, or one of their so called “flaws.” This type of behaviour never resolves problems or issues, but leads to defensiveness and anger in both spouses. When you make solving the issue or problem your common goal, you will look together

at what needs to be done to make the situation better. When that happens you can unite in a solution, instead of isolating yourselves from the one you love.

Tips– Life sometimes throws so much “stuff” at us that we feel we are running on a treadmill that just won’t stop. Down time seems non-existent, and experts tell us that most adults are not at their best because they are constantly sleep deprived. If you see yourself in that statement, then it is time to stop for a moment and ask how this busy life is impacting your married relationship. Do you make your spouse a priority, or do they get the leftovers, of which there are often none? Do you find yourself impatient with the one you love because you are stressed and tired? Marriage is a commitment to the other made in love – are you putting your spouse first, or last? It is an important question to resolve if you want a connected, loving, joyful marriage.

Tip - No marriage or relationship remains stagnant – life changes and experiences that occur on a day to day basis mold and shape us and therefore, our relationships. Now and then it is good to stop and check the new you and see how you have changed: how have these changes impacted your relationship with those you love, especially your spouse? Are you communicating well with your spouse, continuing to be open and honest about your needs and wants and to finding out what theirs might be? Marriage is a work in progress which thrives when we remember to do a checkup now and then!

Tip - In this Year of Mercy, the Pope calls each of us to engage in works of mercy. In marriages we can do this by striving to have a conciliatory spirit. This can be done by comforting our spouse when they are having difficult days, forgiving our spouse when they offend us in word or deed and by patiently bearing wrongs, while expressing what we need instead. Marriage is a place of intimacy and love - both are strengthened when we purposely practice a conciliatory spirit.

Tip - Before a couple begins to parent, they first have a relationship with each other. We know that the best gift parents can give their children is a strong and healthy relationship. Time together as a couple is an excellent way to strengthen your bond – it ensures that love continues to flourish, that you don’t lose your connection to each other as husband and wife and shows your children that you love spending time together. Make spending time as a couple a priority and you will soon see the value it has in your lives.

Tip - New love spurs us on to spend as much time as possible with each other. Once we marry we can get so caught up in the demands of work, home and family that we can lose the sense of connection that pulled us toward each other at the start. Preparing and eating dinner together, sharing a walk, enjoying a good movie, attending Mass, or reading a book together are all great examples of ways to create a stronger couple connection. Building this connection is an important way to form a strong and lasting relationship. Spend time together and see where it takes you!

Tip - As a member of a couple it is important to decide which is more important to you: being right or being connected. When it comes to conflict, which exists in every relationship, it is important to see the other’s view, decide where compromises are possible and together come up with a solution that works for both of you. With a “we” attitude in all you do, including conflict resolution, you can feel more deeply connected and content.

(From: Teresa Hartnett, Family Ministry Office, 905-528-7988 ext. 2250)

Tip - Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), challenges married couples to understand that their love is a call to sacrificial love. He invites each spouse to see their married love as love that must be first and foremost self-giving. When a person in relationship understands this, it helps them to reach beyond themselves and indeed grow. When we take the time to discern our vision of married life and then reach into ourselves to make it happen, both spouses benefit. The Pope is reminding us that love may not be perfect, but it is love and when we nurture it from within, we strengthen and build a deep bond between us.

Tip - The gift of self promised during our wedding vows is essential to put into action during moments of struggle. When a spouse's actions cause anger, sadness or disappointment, we must try to look past the action or words and see the person you love. Instead of responding negatively in the moment, try to understand what has caused this situation and propose a resolution that will work for both of you and for your relationship. In our most vulnerable moments we have a chance to show our greatest love by responding as we should, as opposed to how we feel.

Tip - Observing Lent as a couple is an excellent way to deepen both your spiritual and marital bond. Talk about each of your Lenten resolutions and then assist each other to achieve it. Challenge each other to keep to your resolve, pray for each other on your 40 day journey, and take up activities as a couple that will deepen your faith. Take the three Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving into your relationship and journey the path together. Consider 40 acts of kindness toward each other for the 40 days of Lent. When you focus on achieving goals together, it strengthens your relationship bond as a couple and with God – a win-win Lenten season.

Tip - Two powerful indicators of the health of any relationship are how those involved communicate and settle conflict. Communication works best when people use positive methods: state clearly what you want or need, don't have serious discussions when one or both people are angry, express your love by telling your husband/wife what you love about them, show gratitude on a daily basis and believe you are on the same team, so a resolution must work for both. When we look at conflict as a way to reach out to our spouse and explore our differences, emotions and feelings, we begin to pull something positive out of what may seem at first to be a negative. Words can harm or heal, use yours carefully and properly and your relationship will flourish.

Tip - We live in a time of digital distractions: have you set boundaries around how you will prevent smartphones, tablets and other devices from impacting your life? Their interference has become so prevalent that researchers now have a term to describe it, "technoference," and it is real. How can you take control and decrease the negative impact: limit the amount of time you spend on and checking devices; make rules about digital use during time together; agree on when devices will be prohibited (at meals, on a date, in bed) and stick to it. Disconnect from your devices, not your relationship, and you'll both be happier!

Tip - As a couple it is important to spend time with each other. Take the time to plan something for the two of you to do together at least once a week. Try something new, it will add variety and spice to your life. Have each spouse take a turn planning the activity, but keep it simple. A walk on a new trail, hot chocolate instead of coffee, a new recipe that you will cook together – these will bring moments of joy, not stress. Both quantity and quality of time together matter in a marriage, so try something new and watch for a positive impact!

Tip - Marriages that are cared for reap rewards as the years pass: both people feel connected and in love; children feel secure in the love of their parents; they share times of joy and an ability to pull together when trials present themselves. Couple care includes spending time together, using good communication skills, and asking each other, “What are we doing well, what could we be doing better.” The rewards for continuous care of your marriage are endless!

Tip - Rita McNeil’s Christmas song titled, *With My Family*, has the following line: “All I want under my tree is peace and love and harmony.” It is what we all want in our relationships, but it is important to ask ourselves what we are willing to do to get it. Will we take a peaceful approach to conflict, will we love the good pieces and the struggling pieces of our spouses and will we act in ways that bring us together in our decisions. The line ends with, “Wrap it with a ribbon please, I’ll share it with my family.” What a great Christmas gift to your spouse – a promise to work on peace and love and harmony!

Tip - Love flourishes when we understand the three critical components of every relationship: firm commitment, excellent communication skills and disciplined conflict resolution styles. Love demands that we model these three skills for our spouse and includes a healthy dose of forgiveness when either one of us doesn’t manage a situation quite right. When we work on building these skills together, our love can’t help, but to grow strong.

Tip - In February we celebrate love on Valentine’s Day, but love is an action word, needed every day of every month. This year try something different for Valentine’s Day – make a commitment to tell each other on the 14th of every month what it is you love about each other. An attitude of gratitude, recognizing the good in the other and making a point of telling each other why you are in love is a great way to put love into action and it helps you to never take your love for granted

Tip - We all know that positive reinforcement works best with children, but did you know it has a very positive influence on your married relationship as well? Do you compliment your spouse every day? Do you remember the magical words please and thank you when interacting? Do you take a little time out of your busy day just to touch base and let your spouse know they are on your mind? Do you share at least one meal each day? Try each of these throughout the season of Lent and see their benefits come to light.

Tip - The longer we are in a relationship with someone, the greater our knowledge of that person. When it comes to marriage, this can have both positive and negative impacts on our relationship. On the positive side, it helps us to recognize how our spouse is feeling, what their needs may be and what actions on our part can meet their needs! This intimate knowledge may have a more negative impact when we assume we understand and know what our spouse wants and/or needs without asking since we may be completely off the mark. No matter how well we know a person, we still need good communication in our relationships which requires speaking, listening, negotiating and, perhaps most importantly, not assuming! Ask for clarity, specify desires and speak the truth in love. All of these will draw you closer together.

Tip - “I love you” and “you matter” are important words in every married relationship. The words however, are never enough. Ask yourself how you can show these two expressions in both words and deeds, since words alone are not enough. Ask your spouse to tell you what things you do that express these two small phrases to them – if they can’t think of any, you have some work

to do! Ask them how you could express your love and their importance to you and you will both find joy!

Tip - Expressing gratitude to those we love goes a long way to making them feel appreciated, but as Michele Weiner-Davis (The Divorce Busting Center) pointed out in her recent blog, negativity bias, which scientists refer to as a tendency to be more sensitive to negative stimuli, often causes relationship problems. This bias makes it easy for us to slip into the habit of remarking on anything that is wrong or negative, but forgetting to express the good we experience and feel. We can help overcome this natural bias by being purposeful in our interactions: express appreciation often, say thank you frequently and remember to tell your spouse what you love about your relationship. Doing a frequent check-up is a sure way to ensure you are more positive than negative, which will be reflected in the positive feelings in your marriage.

Tip - The fall harvest is a result of work undertaken throughout the spring and summer. Watering, nourishing, protecting from insects and the weather all contribute to a healthy yield. Why then do we sometimes forget that relationships too need to be cared for? Do we nourish, protect and nurture our spouses? Care for them gently and speak softly? As St. Francis de Sales said, “The worst way of speaking is to speak too much. Therefore speak little and well, speak little and gently, speak little and charitably, speak little and amiably.” A harvest of love can fill every relationship, but it takes commitment and purposeful work to keep our love strong.

Tip - Love is a choice, or more importantly, how we love is a choice. We can choose soft, complimentary and caring words, or we can choose harsh, cutting and angry words. Emotions in any relationship can run high at times, but we can control our emotions if we choose. We can take a moment to breathe deeply, ask ourselves if we want to hurt or offend the one we love and decide what the better words and tone to discuss an issue might be. When we choose wisely, we love more fully and our spouse responds in kind. Love is a choice – make wise decisions and your marriage will flourish.

Tip - Time may be one of the most difficult entities to manage! Quality and quantity matter when it comes to any relationship, including marriage. The more time a couple spend together, in close physical proximity, the better the levels of intimacy they share. Plan time together, just the two of you, whether it be an early or late night coffee without the kids, dinner out, or some time away, being together matters! So, take the time to spend time together and you will reap the benefits.

Tip - The season of Lent is a time when many people “give up” or abstain from something as part of their preparation for Easter. This Lent consider “giving up” finding fault with your spouse and instead look for and compliment daily the good they bring into your life. Instead of expecting your spouse to complete tasks they normally undertake, sacrifice and do their job for them: fill the car with gas, cook dinner, do the laundry, shop for groceries, pay the bills. There are many ways to enter into the spirit of Lent within the family, so this Lent take the three practices of Lent (prayer, fasting and almsgiving) and find ways to unite with your spouse as you carry them out in your family.

Tip - Marriage in the Catholic faith, through the love of the couple, is meant to be the visible sign of God's invisible love for his people. When people observe your relationship do they see love, patience, kindness, and commitment? If the answer is not as often as you would like, then instead of reverting to arguing, whining, or sarcasm when something goes wrong, change your response to your spouse. Be calm in stressful situations, use (learn if necessary) good conflict resolution skills and above all, commit to putting your spouse first. God is divine, but with a few changes, we can move closer to reflecting his love to all who witness our relationship.

Tip - It has been established that an attitude of gratitude improves our health, but can it be beneficial for our spouse as well? Praise, sharing traits in your spouse you are thankful for, holding on to criticism and sharing compliments, thanking your spouse for the small (and large) moments you share – these are but a few ways you can show your spouse gratitude. When we take these actions to heart our spouse feels better physically, mentally and emotionally. A win-win for both partners!

Tip - The concept of work/life balance is proving to be essential to health and people are working hard to ensure that work does not consume their all-important family/other relationships. In marriage it is important to look further at your couple/parenting balance. Family time is essential and necessary, but couple time, sharing a private meal now and then, “dating” and staying connected, are essential to a marriage. The best parenting you can give your child is a strong and healthy couple relationship – find the balance and love will remain strong!

Tip - September brings with it the joy of gathering the harvest from plants we have nurtured from the time of their planting. Well looked after plants provide us with food and/or beauty because of the time we have spent watering, feeding, weeding and protecting them. Marriage is like a garden in this respect – the more we nurture our marriage the stronger our love for each other grows. Like a garden we have to feed and water our marriages by spending couple time together, by talking about small and big moments and feelings, by complimenting, helping and protecting our relationship. The harvest of this nurturing is beautiful love that lasts.

Tip - It is important every now and then that spouses deliberately consider the needs and/or desires of their partner over their own, even if it may not be their first choice of action. Acknowledging a spouse in this manner, in a variety of different circumstances, tells them that you are listening when they express their feelings/desires, puts their needs above your own and makes them feel both cared for and listened to by the one they love. When both remember to act in this manner, couples feel closer, see less anger in their relationship and experience the satisfying feelings of being cared for - a win-win for everyone!

Tip - Touch is important to every human, but when life is busy we can forget its value. A quick kiss, a touch of the arm, or back, a quick or long back scratch are just a few ways that spouses can remain close to each other. Each touch bonds us together and touching when intimacy is not part of the exchange means so much more: it says I love you, you are important and I need you. So hold hands, sit close on the couch and find little and big ways to touch. It will have a profound impact on your connectedness!

Tip - At Christmas we gather with love ones to share gifts, eat great food and build joyful memories. Sometimes we get caught up on the glitter and glam of the season and forget to take time as a couple to decide how much money, time and energy we can expend during the season. This year why not sit down in advance and decide how much you can do as a couple/family. Weave into your plans time for the two of you to take a quiet moment with each other. During Advent and Christmas, take time to pray and share important faith moments with each other. Trying these initiatives could make this Christmas your best yet!

Tip - New Year's Resolutions are often lofty goals that don't last too long after they are made, but even thinking about them reminds us that there is room for change/improvement. This year skip the resolutions and plan for a specific change in your couple relationship: a date night once a month (weekly if that is realistic); time at the end of each day to ask, what did we do good today, what could we do better; holding hands on walks or while shopping; sharing a coffee every morning before the kids wake up or work interferes; finding one thing to thank your spouse for daily; looking for moments to compliment. There are so many more possibilities, so take the time to do something! At the end of 2020 you will feel a renewed sense of connection and love – try one or try them all, but do try something!

Tip - February is often referred to as the month of love, since we celebrate Valentine's Day on Feb. 14th. Real love isn't a fairy tale though – it takes time and effort, good communication and spending time together. This Valentine's Day go big: write each other a love letter, write out a list of the 10 things you most love about your spouse, commit to a date night each month on the 14th to keep the love day alive, look through your wedding album together and remember that moment when you united your love into one. Perhaps most importantly, commit to praying together each day because God is always present to give us strength when we need it!

Tip - Lent is great time to build your marriage bond! Instead of “giving up” something, take a fast from criticizing, complaining or even ignoring your spouse; pray together daily and reflect on how you are called to live your marriage vocation; engage in a Lenten retreat and/or attend the Stations as a couple; read and reflect on a passage of the Bible; consider giving of your time and talent as a couple during the six weeks of Lent. Every activity you undertake will benefit your spiritual life and will also build your bond as a couple as you engage in your Lenten practices together.

Tip - Couple relationships often experience strain during times of stress and the last several months have provided some of the highest stress many couples have faced. It is important to step back and recognize why tensions might be running high and then engage in actions that can release the pent up stress. Try cooking together, walking, biking or hiking together, praying together, or any activity that will bring laughter to the day. It may even mean finding ways to have some time apart, whether that be one being outside while the other is in, or one being on one floor of the house, while the other is on another. Time together is wonderful, but too much can be distressing! Remember that you are in this together and together you can find ways to feel connected and beat any feelings of stress.

Tip - Touch is a vital component for every human being; our bodies were created for relationship and touch is an important component of communication. Our touch conveys both caring and love, but also sends a message about closeness. The more intimate the relationship the more touch matters. Loving touch has proven health benefits as well, so reach out and hold your spouse's hand, give their back or shoulder a little rub now and then, give them a hug and/or kiss as you begin and end each day (and maybe just because!) and let them feel your love. Touch fills the

others heart and mind with the knowledge that they are loved, which is a great boost to every marriage.

Tip - As winter approaches, we move into maintenance mode: we clear the gutters on the roof so water can flow freely, we change to winter tires to prepare for the coming cold and snow and we gather and store outdoor summer items from the yard to keep safe for next year. Do we take the time to offer maintenance to our most important relationship? Do we discuss shifting roles as our family changes and then discuss what we both need to stay happy and healthy? Do we check to see if we have prioritized each other instead of everything else? Do we spend time making sure our finances are in order? Do we pray together for patience, love, kindness and compassion to grow and strengthen in our relationship? Maintenance takes time, but for love to thrive, it is so necessary.

Tip - At the heart of every person is a desire to be known and loved for who we are. We fall in love with someone and then spend extraordinary energy and time on learning about the person. Once we marry, we can forget to keep on discovering who the person we love is becoming – because each of us is always becoming. Time and circumstance constantly change and as a result, the person changes. When the one we love stays interested in who we are, we feel secure, cared-for and loved. So spend some time asking about likes and dislikes, what bothers your spouse and what brings them joy, what is the one thing they would like to do if there were no limitations, what their favourite food is – the possibilities are endless and so is the benefit to your relationship! Make your Christmas gifts this year time and attention!

Tip - Marriage unites two people together in an intimate partnership, allowing each person to feel loved and cared for by their spouse. God made us relational, so marriage meets our need for another in our lives and fulfills our deepest need to be known. Yet, sadly, too many married people feel lonely. So, why not make 2021 a year of joy? Talk to each other about your hopes for the future; tell your spouse about good things or bad that have occurred at work; share a joke, funny story or a frustrating event from your day. When we share our lives with another we connect more deeply, feel part of the others life and loneliness disappears. An easy way to keep intimacy intact and loneliness away.

Tip - In February we celebrate Valentine's Day, a day created to celebrate love and a great month to think back to the days of dating we experienced with our spouses! Days when we flirted, complimented, spent endless hours talking, hated to be apart and planned and went on dates! Now compare it to your time together today – have you given up all or most of these actions? Marriages that continue to have relationships that reflect their dating days feel connected, vitalized and loved. Why not consider making February a month of renewal for your marriage? Purposely create a relationship with your spouse where you give them your time and attention by making them your number one priority and ignite that same spark of love you felt in those early days of dating.

Tip - At the heart of every relationship there needs to be a foundation of love and respect. When couples respect each other, including their differences, they continually build each other up and enjoy time together. When we respect the other in relationship, we can accept their desire to influence us with their understanding of what is true, good and beautiful. When we are open to

our spouse's view of things, we not only grow, but we grow together. When we grow together, we cannot help but grow in love.

Tip - In every new relationship, the brain moves into high gear, desiring to learn more about our love interest and to spend as much time together as possible. It feels good, but the hyper-excitement cannot last – eventually we fall into a calmer relationship, but the desire to feel that initial excitement never really dies. We can capture these moments again by spending time together, trying new activities or new foods, purposely looking for new things in our spouse we have overlooked and complimenting them on what we discover. Feeling loved never grows old and taking some simple steps can keep your love burning bright.

Tip - Listening may be the most important aspect of any relationship, but it is also the hardest part for us to get right! Listening requires our full attention, not just to the words spoken, but also to the emotions attached. Doing so allows us to understand how our spouse is feeling and, if we listen attentively, to repeat back what we are hearing. When we do this without, first making a defensive reply, issues get resolved and our spouse feels supported. Then we can reverse roles, expressing our thoughts and feelings on the issue, as our spouse becomes the listener. Happy couples work on these skills until they become second nature, thus keeping their relationship bond strong.

Tip - Marriages that have lasted over many years give gifts to future generations since it allows them to both look back and grow forward. Long- lasting marriages are a living example of what it means to have enduring love; they give hope. Marriage is at the heart of family, so celebrate your marriage milestones – tell stories of the good times, the times you persevered and the joy of older love. These are important legacies to leave your children and grandchildren!

Tip - Many married relationships naturally change when children are born, since they become such an important part of your life. One way to be the best parents to your children is to be a strong, happy and loving couple. Your couple relationship existed first, so take time together to keep your relationship strong, use good communication skills and support each other as parents. When your children see your love, they will feel secure. You teach your children how to be a spouse, so take the time to show them that your relationship matters: have fun together, go out without your children now and then (once a week if possible) and be sure to work on your couple skills (which they are learning from you). All of these will benefit your children, but most importantly, strengthen your love.

Tip - As we continue to deal with the COVID virus in our communities, people are feeling the continued burden of the unknown about its dangers and how long it will last. This causes stress which might cause couples to lash out at the one they love most. Take some time to change the pattern of your life by planning some fun activities for the two of you, communicate truthfully about how you are feeling, acknowledge that your spouse may not be at their best because they are stressed, hold hands and hug often as touch can relieve stress and pray together that God will give you strength. Feeling united will reduce stress levels for both of you and create a more peaceful environment to help you deal with the unknowns.

Tip - One of the sad facts of life is that many people are struggling with feelings of loneliness. When it comes to marriage, you are not meant to feel lonely, since marriage is meant to be life-giving, joyful and a shared partnership. If loneliness in your marriage is something you are experiencing, it is time to talk about it with your spouse. Take action to change the feelings: plan to share on a more intimate level the “stuff” of life; spend time together engaging in some kind of regular activity; be specific about what you need so you will not feel lonely in your marriage. Alleviating loneliness is vital for your mental and emotional health and it will certainly help you to recapture the true joy and meaning of your married relationship.

Tip - Intentional divorce and conscience uncoupling are two terms becoming popular in North American vernacular, but what we should be promoting is intentional marriage and conscience coupling. The research is clear that couples can take steps to remain and even deepen their love. Consciously making the decision to spend time together, to share our deepest feelings (good and bad), to use touch throughout the day, to make date-night (however that looks) a priority will build your couple relationship. Looking for moments of gratitude and thanking your spouse will increase the loving bond between you. This Christmas make conscience coupling your gift to each other; it may be the best gift you will ever receive!

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Tip - Some people drift into their relationships over a number of years, but it can also be said that people drift out of their relationships as well. We can become complacent and take for granted all the nice things a spouse does for us and/or sometimes we stop doing nice things for them. Over time we compliment less, spend less time together, stop sharing our day, feelings, or hopes and dreams and suddenly lose sight of the other. When we continue to treat our relationship as new, taking the time to discover who the other is and complimenting them for it, we stay firmly attached instead of drifting apart.

Tip - In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes: “After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the “greatest form of friendship”. It is a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life.” (AL #123) February is a great month to spend some time with this beautiful quote and ask yourself if your love truly reflects a great friendship, or if it is time to restore these traits to your marriage.

Tip - The season of Lent is a perfect time to reflect on how we are living our lives according to God’s call to discipleship and vocation. The vocation of marriage is an essential call since the Sacrament of Marriage is meant to be the visible sign of God’s invisible love to the world. Lent then, is a perfect time to examine what you are bringing to your vocation, to see if forgiveness is

readily available when needed and to contemplate whether you might make changes to better fulfill your call to marriage. As well, consider praying with your spouse, reflecting on a short Bible passage daily and working on holding anger during Lent, since all of these will strengthen your bond of love and bring you feelings of joy as the Easter season draws near.