“The Christian family...is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.”

On the Family, Pope John Paul II

Marriage Tip from foryourmarriage.org

“There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12) Which gift does your beloved have in a special way: wisdom, faith, the ability to heal, industriousness, intuition, decision making skills, communication? Affirm him or her.

What have you done for your marriage today?

For Your Marriage has ideas to help you make your marriage healthier.

An initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Dinner for two
by Deacon Larry Spohr

*Deacon Spohr talks about the value of Date Nights for couples and how to host one in your parish!*

Sarah and Jim had just returned home from a parish marriage enrichment; an event Jim wanted nothing to do with from the start. This discussion, like many others, lasted late into the evening and led to many more issues that had been stored in their “relationship closet;” issues they never found time to discuss. After the enrichment, Jim sheepishly admitted that the evening was fun and well worth it and that he was glad he attended. He enjoyed it so much that when the parish scheduled another one for Sweetest Day, he registered without telling Sarah, and a week before, presented her with a dozen roses and a card with the registration in it.

Problem
Today, it is very difficult for married couples to find the time to enrich and strengthen their marital relationship; too many demands are placed on them, especially if they have children. Yet the strength of that relationship is vital for a stable and healthy marriage to survive. Studies have found that one way couples break away from the stress around them is to occasionally go out for dinner. It gives them a chance to share their feelings and to do something they have had little–to–no time to do, and that is to communicate.

Finding a Solution
Churches have tried various enrichments to minister to couples but attendance was low. Then the idea surfaced to use the going out to dinner approach and it became an instant success! Not only was it a success for Sarah and Jim but in reading evaluations and in discussions with participants after the event it had proven to be not only a fun evening but an excellent means of getting couples to empty out those closets of stored up issues. This became the foundation on which was built the “Dinner for Two” enrichment.

The Concept is Simple:
- The most successful evenings have been held in banquet halls or partitioned–off sections of restaurants or even church halls, if properly decorated.
- The ideal number of couples for the event is 25 to 30. An upfront charge is required to hold a reservation. The incurred cost is not to make a profit but to offset the expenses for the event.
- The most challenging factor is in selling it so couples fully understand its
content and value. Once they understand it, or after the success of having one, couples will be coming to you wanting to know when and where the next one is!

- It is important to communicate with the registered couples well in advance with all the details—where the event is, start and ending times, agenda, maybe a little introduction to the speaker. More will attend if you can commission someone reliable to furnish babysitting.

- The atmosphere needs a mood of its own. Dimmed lights, possibly candles at each table, soft music plays an intricate part for the evening, a host to seat guests as they come in. Several parishes have had the couples bring mementos of their wedding or of a special event in their lives to put on their table.

- The theme can be incorporated into the talk and marketing, and can serve as the main focus of discussion for the couples. If the dinner is a 5–course dinner, 5 questions can be placed in an envelope on each table and with each course a new question is opened and discussed.

- The speaker should be sensitive and able to relate to how the evening’s theme and selected questions play a significant role in the lives of married couples. The main talk is usually given after the meal before the renewal of wedding vows. Possible themes: positive communication, forgiveness, empathy, faith in each other and God, time together, commitment, appreciation, and coping through stress and crisis.

- Don’t do buffet! Ask for volunteers to serve the couples. A buffet is not seen as being as special.

- After the speaker, serve anniversary cake, followed by a renewal of vows with a nuptial blessing bestowed on the couples.

- Socializing and dancing completes the evening.

- Be sure to get evaluations, either then or through email to help in future planning.

Deacon Larry and his wife Fran, have been married for 50 years. They have two married sons and five grandchildren. They do marriage ministry at their parish, St. Bede in Ingleside, IL. They’ve been involved with Family Ministries since 1976.