



Comments from Existing Marriage Prep Facilitators

The following is a summary of comments received from existing facilitators of the *Real Life, Real Love* and *God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage* programs. Comments received during December 2008 and January 2009.

“We did have a hard time putting into words how we feel about the MP Program...the Mp days we facilitate and the rewards we receive from doing it - it is almost beyond words to express.”

Why did you get involved in MP?

- Our MP day did so much for us before we got married that we wanted to give back.
- I can think of little else more important to our lives, our culture, our world than helping engaged couples get a full, spiritual, religious look at their relationship and their future marriage. The Catholic faith has a veritable treasure of concepts on the beauty and meaning of sacramental marriage.
- We got started with the program because we loved our marriage preparation day and wanted to provide the same, if not better, day than we had. When we were approached with the possibility of joining the Marriage Prep team, we were married 4 years and had a baby on the way. We felt like we had something to share and were excited to get started.
- We got involved in the Marriage Prep Program because the Pastoral Associate at our parish asked us if we would be interested. At first, I was a bit skeptical because I didn't know if I was being “called” to this ministry or being “roped into something.” My wife would have probably said yes right away. Our expectation was that we were being asked to pontificate and lecture to the engaged couples on how wonderful our marriage has been over the years. When we found out that we were supposed to share our mistakes, problems, and stressful times, I realized that maybe this was something that I was capable of doing.

What were your expectations?

- We didn't know what to expect, so we were pretty open. We had no idea what this program would do for our marriage....
- I'm not sure we had any particular expectations, except that we would be expected to share personal experiences from our relationship. We saw first hand what an impact sharing very personal experiences had on the program, so we tried hard to share our personal struggles and triumphs.

How specifically has it impacted your marriage?

- It helps us to understand each other better, makes us take time together and actually talk about our marriage (the good and the bad), makes us reflect on how our marriage has grown and changed, and has helped us to actually talk about certain subjects that are hard to talk about.
- Our marriage has strengthened immeasurably because of the Marriage Prep Program. Every time we revise our notes, it's like reflecting on our marriage as a whole, rather than just dealing with the every day workings of being a couple and a family. It's time that we have together to praise

God for the blessings He's lavished on us and on our family, and to marvel at how we've grown over the course of our marriage. A great advantage for us is that it's like the ultimate date--an entire day for just the two of us to concentrate on one another and the love we share. And in the more human moments of marriage--those which do not shine perhaps quite as brightly as some others--it's a wonderful way to bring to the forefront all the reasons we fell in love, married one another, and remain married....it's not "just for the kids"!

- My husband and I took a long time coming to this program. We had been pursued for years, but had responsibilities of grad school, babies, and a family loss. When we were ready to finally commit, our hearts and schedules were ready for the full commitment of this privilege and responsibility. It was very time consuming - it took about 6 months for us to be fully trained and ready to present our first prep day. But I say that not as an inconvenience. For 6 months, my husband and I got to spend 1 night a month with two other Godly couples, and one night a week together, just focusing on our marriage. What a blessing! We had Tuesday nights with no TV, no commitments, just to be together and work on our talks. We got to reflect on our marriage, the goods and the bads, and revisit our own marriage prep days. Were we where we thought we'd be? What was better? What was harder?
- Each time we do a Marriage Prep day we become much closer. We always have a great trip home. It's one thing to know your past experiences in your head and remember. It's another thing when you relive them. It makes you realize the difficult times and the good times. You realize all you have made it through with God's help. You both can be proud of all you have accomplished. With this your love continues to grow.

How does volunteering help you?

- The reward we feel is something we cannot express. It does help us to learn more every time about our marriage and about ourselves. It reminds us of the willingness and calling we all have to God and his church.
- We have been affected by the many couples we have worked with and have met at our MP days. They have all impacted our lives in ways we never expected.
- The radiant love shown forth from the engaged couples is a happy reminder of those giddy and wonderful days which my wife and I experienced years ago. It is a joy to be able to encourage goodness and holiness in the lives of so many.
- We got involved with Real Life, Real Love as a way to share with couples our experiences of married life. In the process of preparing to work with the couples, we had to discuss many areas of strength and difficulty in our own marriage. Discussing these things at a time when any issues were not present really helped us to see some things more clearly. This gave us the ability to communicate and problem solve better ourselves. So in offering to help others, it benefitted our own marriage!
- We benefitted by making sure we spend time thinking about and analyzing our relationship. It is amazing how many things manage to keep us busy, especially after having kids.
- Since we started presenting, we've had the privilege of meeting more Godly couples as we've partnered to strengthen marriages in our diocese. We have been so blessed to hear the testimonies of other married couples. We feel like every weekend we present is a mini marriage enrichment day for us. We enjoy some time away from our children as a couple, and we enjoy joining other couples on their path to holiness!
- It is not easy getting up in front of people that you don't know and reliving some very unpleasant experiences, but Mary Jo and I always feel closer to each other at the end of the day knowing that we are still together in spite of enduring these difficult situations.

How do you think you have helped others??

- We have heard that we have made a huge impact on many couples but it doesn't make us feel like we are any better than anyone else. We just share our story (the good & bad) and let the Spirit guide our words.
- As a married deacon of the church, with 4 married children, I can better appreciate the necessity of some "leaven" in the dough of our culture's view of marriage and family life.

What would I tell a potential couple on why they should get involved?

- Well, there's the old saying, "You'll never know unless you try." I think more than that, it's a sure way of strengthening any marriage. You have the potential to meet other wonderful couples and learn from them--especially if they've been married 20 years or more--as well as many of the good priests of our diocese. It's a great way to see the fruits of marriage and the potential to help plant some good seeds within the young couples who take part in the program. Just the knowledge that we are doing something outwardly to promote and support traditional marriage and family life is itself a great blessing.
- Marriage is under attack in our society. We are privileged to be a part of the army of God, upholding Truth and His teachings and plan for married couples. Marriage is the foundation of a healthy society. We are simply doing our part not only as good citizens of this country, but as citizens in God's kingdom. I can truly say we've received much more than we've given!!
- We would tell a prospective couple that they should consider getting involved in order to help prepare the engaged couples, not for the good times, but rather, for the tough times. The feedback that we get from the couples at the end of the day usually tells us that they appreciated what we shared with them and that it will have a positive impact on their upcoming marriage.

And for those of you involved for some length of time, why have I kept at it all these years!

- We've been involved with the Marriage Prep ministry for four years now, and though we've not done as many days as some other couples, we have been thoroughly blessed each time we venture out. You never know who the couples will be, how they will receive the message that the Holy Spirit is bringing to them through you, or just what the feedback sheets will say...but there are always tremendous graces which flow from participating. (I think the only thing we would ever do to change our participation would be to increase the number of sessions we put on our calendar...and wouldn't that be great? In time, as the kids grow and projects diminish, we hope for this to be the case!) There's something wonderful about that surprise element that keeps us coming back. The times we have gotten negative feedback, we've been assured that it's because the work we are doing is God's work, and that it's just not always taken in the good light in which it is intended. There are so many changes being made to this ministry which greatly enhances what the engaged couples are able to learn, and it is exciting to be part of this time of change. We are enthusiastic that the additions and revisions to the program will help to create stronger, holier marriages in our diocese, which in turn will help to foster stronger, holier families--out of which will come forth strong, holy vocations! Praise God!!
- It is amazing what impact our culture can have on our relationship. It is awesome to remind us of the Catholic values that we hope to keep central in our relationship. It is also great to share that with other couples since most of the time we are surrounded by more worldly couples who may not have the same values (so we enjoy the fellowship). This is why we have stayed with the program so long.