

# Young couples inspired by grandparents' example

## FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

With Christian Meert

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: Last November, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter on marriage titled "Love and Life in the Divine Plan" (<http://usccb.org/laity/loveandlife/>).*

*The letter contains valuable insights for married and engaged couples as well as those involved in marriage preparation.*

*In this last of six parts, Christian Meert, co-director of the diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, examines the bishops' pastoral letter and how it relates to practical realities of married life.]*

Marriage is front-page news these days. According to the latest poll conducted by Pew Research and Time Magazine ([pewresearch.org/pubs/1802/decline-marriage-rise-new-families](http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1802/decline-marriage-rise-new-families)), 95 percent of Americans under age 30 want to get married. Although the poll also reveals some disturbing trends, a big reason behind this desire to marry is probably the fact that the grandparents of this age group had lifelong marriages.

Grandparents are very important in their grandchildren's lives. They represent the stability and the security that their grandchildren long for in our ever-changing society. Many children live in broken families, and their grandparents are like an anchor they can hold on to. They look up to them.

Nine times out of 10, the engaged couples that we work with mention their grandparents as being the people who had the deepest spiritual impact on their lives, much more frequently than their own parents, their pastors or teachers.

Grandparents often underestimate the influence their opinion has in the eyes of the rest of the family. Their life experiences give them a certain wisdom grandchildren often look up to. They can answer their grandchildren's questions about their faith, about their spiritual journey, their prayer life or about abortion, contraception and pre-marital sex.

Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to the United Kingdom on Sept. 18, said: "Every generation can learn from the experience and wisdom of the generation that preceded it."

How can grandparents pass on their wisdom and experience?

They can do this by living their faith openly on a daily basis, guarding and maintaining the spiritual and moral compass of the whole family. It is a good idea for them to have their home "prayer corner" in plain sight for everyone to see, as a testimonial of their Christ-centered lives.

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Often times, they also show their faith by being active in their parish, teaching catechesis or attending a Bible study group.

When the parents agree, taking their grandchildren to church is an opportunity for great bonding time.

One Hispanic engaged couple commented on how fun it was for them to do marriage preparation. Three generations were living under the same roof, and it became a family affair to do the preparation, under the wise guidance of the grandparents. Everybody, parents included, learned a great deal from them.

As the moral compass for their grandchildren, grandparents should also stand firm in their convictions in front of the whole family. For example, in our family, it is a rule that grandchildren (or anybody else) visiting with their boyfriend or girlfriend will sleep in two different rooms.

Polls also show other trends in marriages; not only do couples get married later in life — the median age for first time marriage being 28.2 for men and 26.1 for women — but more couples are asking for their longtime civil marriage to be convalidated by the church. I've seen couples asking the church to convalidate their 40-year-old civil marriage. It often happens after a deep conversion of one or both spouses or because the Catholic spouse wants to be able to receive the Eucharist again.

So whether couples of grandparenting age were married in the church recently or have always been married in the church, if they have passed their child-bearing years, they can still give life in so many different ways other than physically: socially, intellectually, artistically and, above all, spiritually.

Grandparents are more and more the guardians of their families' spiritual heritage. They usually are more available to the church, to society and mainly to their families, children and grandchildren. What a gift they are for the church.

It is more than likely that grandchildren will remember the moments they spent with their grandparents all their lives.