
WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE (9)



As we reach the end of my Pentecost 2004 pastoral letter, I want to express my deep gratitude to all those who helped me write it, especially the couples who shared with us their beautiful and moving testimonies.

TESTIMONY: MUCH AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE COUPLE

We have been one before God in the state of matrimony for 45 years, now. At the time, the sacrament was a life-long contract. The commitment we made before the priest was taken seriously. We were convinced that with God's grace it would be possible for us to journey together through life. Before deciding to marry – even if it was the Great Love Affair – we turned to God with much prayer. We also took marriage preparation courses in order to have all the chances on our side, to succeed this grand project we held so dear. If we are still together today it is because God has always been with us. He has guided us, sustained and protected us because of our trust in him. He himself promised it: "I am with you always, to the end of time." The Lord is there, but we as a couple must do our share to keep this love alive and growing. This is not always easy because of all the worries, concerns, and difficulties of life. We went through the same stages as today's young couples. We had three children. I worked outside the home and my husband worked away, at first, and would be home only weekends; later he got a job closer to home and did shift work. I was pleased with this because we could now share tasks. There must be much agreement between the couple, to be able to work together: looking after the house, preparing meals, looking after the children's homework and lessons, and to be involved in activities with our children, especially weekends. Even when we were very busy we took time to attend church together as a family, every Sunday. It was there that we renewed ourselves and received the help needed to carry out our mission. With our differences and our weaknesses, it is quite a challenge to live together in harmony, as a couple. One must learn to give in to the other; one is never totally right nor completely wrong. One must learn to accept the other's ideas, and dialogue together, to reach an understanding. We have always been concerned with not leaving misunderstandings go on. It is important for each individual to feel accepted, loved, understood. There must be space for one to experience life without being smothered by the other. One must also learn to respect the other's ideas without having one's enthusiasm stifled. It is here that we must learn to turn to God. He knows our good will as well as our weaknesses. Since he loves us and his heart is stronger than the whole world, we must not give in to fear because we know that he comes to the aid of our weaknesses and is always with us. We have had our highs and lows. If we had not solved our differences at the time they appeared, we, too, could have gone our separate ways. However, I don't believe that this thought ever crossed our minds: we always reconciled and started anew. Today we are happy and proud to still be together for our children who are now parents, and for our grandchildren.

– *Jacqueline and Philippe*

TESTIMONY: ALWAYS KINDLING THE FIRE OF OUR LOVE

No one really knows what one is getting into at the time of marriage, especially not when one is twenty. Everything is focussed on the person and what that person is ready to do, to succeed his or her life in a couple relationship. We took a course and got to know oneself before getting to know the other. We need to have basic good manners, which are gradually disappearing from our schools: respect, trust, sharing, politeness, etc. Love means sacrifice. As Jesus gave himself out of love to save us, we call it a sacrifice of love. When one makes a sacrifice for the sake of the other, it makes one happy to know that the other is happy. Then all is focussed on the love we have for the other, wanting to share everything and to give of oneself for the sake of peace and harmony. One gets a sense of self-worth in knowing that one has had a hand in bringing happiness to loved ones. We must deny ourselves for the sake of our children. We do not always feel to go here and there for them, but we do it in love. Love means looking together in the same direction. Love is not jealous. We both know that Jesus is love, and it is in him that we draw our love. It is therefore very important

for us two to unite ourselves before God. We have always continued to grow in faith and in love of Jesus. Attending church is one of our priorities, and praying together before bedtime is part of our daily ritual. We have great trust in one another, and make decisions together: dialogue is very important in a couple's life. It is all the small things of the day that keep our love healthy: helping one another, thanking one another, never going to bed with a misunderstanding between us, never bringing up past issues. We must always go forward and remain aware that we are lucky to be loved and to have someone to love. We must never assume that the other is our property. We must always kindle the fire of our love. For us, our marriage was a promise to always be there for the other in good times and in bad, and in respect of one another. It is still like that today, and we are always honest with one another.

– Bernard and Adeleen

TESTIMONY: WE ARE A FOSTER FAMILY

We were married July 1, 1977. It was through *La Rencontre* Movement that we received the call. We had our *Rencontre* Weekend in 1975 and then continued as part of a weekly prayer group. I eventually became facilitator of the group and Adrien worked in the technical area. Our marriage was a religious celebration filled with love and with songs we sang at the *Rencontre*. We were surrounded by our friends. When I was pregnant for our first child in 1979 we attended a mini-*Rencontre* outside Québec City. Our child was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and we called her Marie Angie because she really looked like an angel; to us she was a gift of heaven. After the birth of our first child we became a foster family. I wanted deprived children to have a family that loves them and helps them grow. My husband agreed to this, and together we built a beautiful family. Through the years we have been foster parents to 39 children. Today we still have two teen-agers with us, besides our three beautiful daughters. We adopted 8 of our 39 foster children. We are their family and their children's grandparents. Our daughter grew up helping the children we were caring for, and she wants to dedicate her life to relieve human misery and the suffering of the needy. I sincerely believe that whatever we do to the least of his children, it is to Jesus that we do it. We have always been involved in volunteer work and committees, in our parish. We have a deep faith; however, we are human and make mistakes. We want to continue attending church and taking communion, because we need that. Please pray for us.

– Pierrette and Adrien

TESTIMONY: THE VILLAGE CHURCH

I cannot remember exactly the song to Saint Ann we used to sing at weddings, but one of those songs that really affected us was the [French] song, "Clocher de mon village" – "My Village Church." It really described everything going on in our community. "Beloved village church which witnessed my birth and where I was baptised, village church which watched me run about, grow, and witnessed my wedding. Beloved church, attached to life as heart is to body and love is to country..." The church was an important witness of our loves and labours: it was the symbol of our lives. When we were married in 1965, the parish centennial album noted that there were, that year, 88 baptisms, 37 weddings, and 22 funerals... Following a one-year engagement, fully trusting in life we were married June 19, 1965. My husband and I have always worked outside the home, he on construction and I as a cook. We have four children who were real gifts of God to us, and who are our happiness. There have been difficulties, but love had the better of it every time, and I would dare say that my husband loved me twice as much, then! Faith has helped us through the greatest difficulties possible, especially the death of one of our children and a house fire. We are now the grandparents of six; we watch over them and share their joys and hopes with them.

– Germaine and Ralph

+ François Thibodeau *in*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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