

50 Percent of Marriages End in Marriage

Divine Mercy University

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About four years ago, my brother-in-law (before he was my brother-in-law) said something to me that I still think about today. We were sitting in the kitchen of his home in Plainfield, NJ, with his wife standing at the stove prepping a dinner that I've long forgotten—except that it was delicious—discussing topics ranging from homeownership and jobs to the adventures of marriage and raising kids.

A former seminarian from Brooklyn, he felt compelled to lay down some knowledge and inform me that “There are some things they don't warn you about in marriage.”

I married his wife's sister anyway.

We married knowing fully well that there are no perfect marriages. Although we would've loved to be like the Fredricksens from the movie *Up*—where the opening scenes and montage doesn't show them arguing at all—the real adventure is knowing that that is not the reality of marriage. Meetings with our priest and our conference for engaged couples in our preparation helped us understand that, and further developed our understanding of marriage as a commitment into the unknown future that a husband and wife vow before God to take together; a lifelong journey side by side, hand in hand, towards the sunset.

But like all commitments—and all ventures into unknown futures—things happen. Obstacles arise that can throw married couples into odd, difficult and even tense situations. Some couples may just need help creating good communication patterns in their marriage. Others may feel distant from each other and aren't sure why, or find themselves in a rut and want to find a way to start over. Obstacles like finances, home and car repairs, family matters, emergencies and unexpected occurrences can lead to tense discussions, heated arguments or a distancing silence, leaving the couple frustrated, in pain, and looking for ways to heal and move forward. That lifelong journey towards the sunset is not without a lifetime of obstacles to face.

On March 9th and 10th, married couples will have the opportunity to address those obstacles head on at Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center in Maryland, where faculty members from Divine Mercy University (DMU), led by Associate Professor Dr. Lisa Klewicki, will host a retreat for couples looking to reconnect, repair and re-energize their marriage.

“This retreat is primarily aimed at helping couples deepen their relationship, their level of communication, and emotional connection,” said Dr. Jonathan Marcotte, a Licensed Psychologist for Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska. “It's based off of scientifically validated psychological studies on ‘Attachment Theory’ that have been heavily researched for over 50 years.”

Dr. Marcotte, a graduate of DMU's Psy.D. program in 2017, ran this two-day workshop with Dr. Klewicki and her team last year. Modeled from the "Hold Me Tight" workshop format for couples developed by clinical psychologist and founding Director of the International Centre for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), Dr. Sue Johnson.

Dr. Klewicki and her team immersed the Catholic faith into its structure to help guide couples through the first phases of EFT and improve their ability to experience God's love within their marriage.

Dr. Kathleen Musslewhite, also an alumna of DMU, will be a part of Dr. Klewicki's team this year. She's a licensed psychologist who practices in Frederick, Maryland.

"The purpose is to help couples who are married to recognize some common obstacles in marriage through the lens of EFT," she said. "I've used EFT for three years now and find it really kind of amazing. It takes the pressure off the couple and puts it on the reactive attachment cycle."

This workshop is not a replacement for marriage therapy. According to Dr. Musslewhite, it is in the context of programs for marriage enrichment. The couples spend the weekend engaging with each other—talking to each other—and no therapeutic relationship is created. The therapists are there to present information and opportunities and help the couples with the exercises, but they do not speak with the couples. There are some couples who may end the weekend realizing that they need more extensive therapy.

"Couples from all sorts of situations have come on past retreats," said Marcotte, "ranging from newlyweds to couples who are so distressed that divorce is on the table. This retreat is specifically for couples who feel like they're 'stuck' in a constant state of negative interactions with each other. It's for couples who feel disconnected and want to rekindle feelings of closeness with each other. This retreat certainly pushes each individual to dig deeper

into their own roles regarding negative interactions with their spouse, as well as to put aside their frustrations in order to hear each other's pain."

"I remember at the last one I attended, there were couples who expressed to me 'ah ha' moments," said Musslewhite. "They expressed that they were in the middle of reactive cycles but couldn't see the pattern. Once they saw the patterns, they felt more empowered. Another couple was able to recognize the behavior that had previously felt critical and judgemental now felt like a cry for closeness, a need for secure attachment."

In addition to the workshop being immersed in Catholic theology, the workshop is immersed in the sacraments. Confession will be offered throughout the day and Mass will be offered in the evening.

"This is a wonderful reason why this workshop is so effective," said Marcotte. "Integrating the sacraments allow more opportunities for God's grace to pervade into the couple's experience. It is incredibly important as couples become more vulnerable and take advantage of this opportunity to allow God's love to give courage and solace to the one being vulnerable, as well as giving grace and peace to the one receiving and responding to the other's vulnerability."

The workshop takes it a step further by allowing the couples, at the workshop's conclusion, the opportunity to renew their marriage vows. It's optional and the couples are not obliged to partake, one may think that there's extra pressure on the couples that attend knowing that's available at the end.

"The sacraments and the renewal of vows are all offered, but certainly not compulsory," said Musslewhite. "Some couples don't stay for the Mass and renewal of vows at the end of the weekend. For other couples, it's the highlight of the weekend."

“Well, it might!” Marcotte exclaimed when asked if couples attending may feel the pressure of the renewal of vows. “A lot of couples get into some deep places if they take this workshop seriously, and while it’s a place to do some deep healing and restructuring, it can take couples to places they never wanted to go. If a couple feels unresolved in some difficult parts of their relationship, they might feel forced to do marriage vows.”

“However,” Marcotte continued, “renewing vows is also symbolic of the element of love that *is* a **choice**, and this opportunity allows them to make a conscious choice to love each other and continue fighting for a positive relationship.”

No marriages are perfect, and the world is full of obstacles that can dissuade a couple from keeping the fire of their love lit. But within that commitment to each other is the love and hope to acknowledge when those obstacles are affecting our relationship, and to make every effort toward identifying and remedying those obstacles toward rekindling that love that originally brought them together.

For more information about this workshop and future workshops, click here: <https://ourladyofbethesda.org/healing-your-love-tools-overcoming-obstacles-marriage#panel-2>