

JUNE'S ARTICLE: MAKING A GOOD THING BETTER

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Have you ever had a vegetable garden? If so, you know that to have a garden, the ground has to be prepared, seeds sown, tender shoots protected, the growing plants periodically fed and watered, maturing plants weeded and insects repelled. If you religiously do all these things, the harvest will come in the form of healthy, tasty food. You will even have enough abundance to put some away for the winter so you don't grow hungry. But next year, you must start the cycle all over again.

So it is in marriage. Marriage enrichment is about tending your marital garden so you can obtain from it all the blessings and benefits of marriage. If you do this well, then when the inevitable hard emotional times come, you can overcome them because of the reserves you have built up by your work. Lots of people don't understand this. In my work with couples, I have often heard, "It just shouldn't be this hard." Of course it should! Living with others who are usually very different from yourself requires a lot of effort. To believe otherwise is to approach marriage with a very immature understanding of relationships.

What are some of the ways you can "tend your garden?" Here's a short list of possibilities.

- **Buy, read and use good books on marriage.** An excellent book on communication, the one I would have written if I had ever gotten around to it, is *The Power of Two: Secrets of a Strong & Loving Marriage*: by Susan Heitler and Paula Singer. It's available from Amazon.com for under \$15.00 including shipping. Another book I would recommend if things are a little tough in your marriage right now is *Relationship Rescue* by Phillip McGraw (Dr. Phil of Oprah fame).
- **Attend a marriage enrichment workshop.** In the fall, Holy Communion hopes to offer such a workshop, but others may be available in the community right now.
- **Create your own small group of married couples.** Other couples you know have the same kinds of struggles you face and they can share ways in which they overcame those problems. I currently facilitate such a group of couples once a month, most of whom are members or former members of St. Elisabeth Episcopal Church. They have been meeting for a pot luck and sharing for years and years. It's informal, low threat, and fun. If you think you might like something like that at Holy Communion, contact me at 767.6987 and let's talk about it.
- **And my simplest tip of all: treat your partner the way you want to be treated!** Doing this requires paying attention to the importance of the relationship and to the needs of your partner. It includes what I call "small kindnesses." Let me give you an example. Carol, my wife, and I are empty-nesters. Dinner is very informal, including being served straight from the pots and pans to the plates. Some time back, she began to prepare my plate for me and bring it to me. I never expected that and certainly don't require it. She does it as a "small kindness," an act of love. For my part, I have every day since before we were married, tell her how much I enjoyed

the meal she prepared *and* thank her for preparing it! She found that strange in the beginning and asked me why I did it. I told her it was because I really did appreciate the time and effort she put into it, even if it was just a sandwich, and I didn't want her to feel as if I thought this was her "job." I see it as a gift and I thank people for gifts. She thinks I'm nuts, but I know she actually likes that I still do it every time!