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## WITNESSES OF GOD'S LOVE (7)

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May the witness of these couples help us rediscover the beauty and grandeur of Christian marriage! And may my Pentecost 2004 pastoral letter stimulate reflection on the subject.

### TESTIMONY: IN THE WAY OF TRUST AND FORGIVENESS

We got to know one another at a very early age and were married at the age of 15 and 18 respectively. Our decision to commit ourselves to such a project was nevertheless thought out, and our decision to start a family together was a conscious decision offered to God. Common prayer, Sunday mass, putting into practice the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians ("Love is patient, love is kind," etc.), communication, forgiveness and starting over again have been our faithful friends, over the years. We quite often consulted with a priest who guided us in the way of trust and forgiveness. Our young love and five children brought us many joys, as many reasons to continue to build our life's project of community together despite the normal but sometimes difficult times of life. Like all couples, we have been through all kinds of periods. Years of happiness and joy together, with our small family. There were so many beautiful trips, picnics, camp fires in the back yard, and Sunday drives – what memories they bring back! In other words, small joys of life which unite and build a strong, healthy, united family. All of these little nothings have helped develop bonds of friendship, mutual understanding, and love, in our life as a couple. The birth of grandchildren brought our love to a new high, and we have been blessed by these heaven-sent gifts to us. We have also had more difficult moments, in our married life. We want to mention this because it is only in books that we read about rose-coloured marriages! Every normal couple is composed of two distinct beings who change a bit every day, over the years: to keep the fire of their love burning, the couple must remarry every morning! Prayer and forgiveness are wonderful ways of doing this. The happy life of a couple is made of eternal beginnings. We continue our journey together, with the Spirit of God leading us on.

– Louise and Ghislain

### TESTIMONY: OUR MARRIAGE IS A "MÉNAGE À TROIS"

We met one September 1, on a first day at work. After rubbing shoulders together in the workplace for some two years, there rose in us a desire to live together: that was when we decided to join one another for life. However, what kind of union would it be? We wanted one in which our love could grow, a simple, honest love consistent with our religious beliefs. So we chose to be married in church. This was such a beautiful gift to one another! Our love continued to grow and is still growing because we give one another the opportunity to blossom in our given missions, and we respect one another in what we are. We have also grown biologically and have been blessed with two beautiful, healthy children. Things didn't happen by themselves, though: that is why we turn to our good Friend, God! We call on him any time, any place, in any situation. We are assured of his listening ear and, besides, if we listen to him, he answers us. Isn't this wonderful? As I mentioned at the beginning, there are three of us: myself, the other, and God. The three must be present, and there must be much communication between them, if we are to succeed in the grand love project which is Christian marriage. P.S. Here is a secret: our Friend's cell phone number is 1-800-PRAY!

– Françoise and Donald

### TESTIMONY: FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND THROUGH ONE ANOTHER

Our love story began 38 years ago. We were engaged for four years and got to know one another and to seek the other's presence, while keeping ourselves pure for our marriage vows. We were married July 13, 1970. Coming from two families where Christian values were very important, we did not even question our union before God. It was what we wanted, we wanted God to bless our love, and we wanted him to be at the heart of our union. In order to further deepen our life together we had the opportunity, the first years of our marriage, to facilitate marriage preparation meetings. This allowed us to share together on points we had not discussed before. We recommend these meetings to every couple that plans on getting married. Three beautiful children were born of our union; they are our joy, and we are very proud of them. Like all couples, we have had our highs and lows. We believe that we were able to get through the hard times thanks to the respect we have for one another. We can honestly say that forgiveness is always present in our lives. We believe that forgiveness is possible only with God's grace. Our secret is to never go to sleep without asking one another's forgiveness. We must always protect our love, and we must both look in the same direction. Since our last child is in college, the two of us are now alone together. We have also discovered another dimension of our love: we live for one another, and through one another. What is wonderful is that we can still be in awe of one another! We can also say that the more our love is deep, more also do our faith and hope in God increase. We thank God every day for the graces he showers on us. May we grow old together as united as we are now, and may God reserve a small place for Gaétan and Lucille in his Kingdom!

– Gaétan and Lucille

### TESTIMONY: THE LOVE AND GOODNESS OF GOD

Both of us are from poor families, financially, but so very rich in human and Christian values such as faith, charity, helping one another, and love. At age ten Julie read the book, *Enfants de Fatima* ["Children of Fatima"]. The book had a strong influence on her devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Julie always loved children and had always thought about getting married and having a family. She prayed the Blessed Virgin that she would meet the right party. In 1976 we made each other's acquaintance in Edmundston. Julie was teaching at the Académie Conway and I was working for Canada Manpower in Edmundston. We met in the Grand Central Hotel where each of us boarded. We knew one another as friends for six months before we started going out together. Our relationship developed on the good foundation of friendship, before developing into love. We feel that this later promoted good communication in our life as a couple. Having done religious studies with Father [later, Archbishop] Donat Chiasson, Julie felt ready for marriage. Likewise, Paul's studies at Collège de l'Assomption in Moncton gave a solid basis to the sacrament of matrimony. Like most couples, we give one another the sacrament of matrimony to continue our life's journey in Jesus Christ. The Great Day was June 30, 1969, at Cheticamp, Nova Scotia. With time and a deeper understanding of marriage, we became aware that it draws us more and more to Jesus Christ who is the source of our love. We realise that he invites us as persons and as a couple to love as he loves us, a welcoming, forgiving, fruitful, respectful love in a spirit of service and freedom. With marriage preparation meetings and our involvement as facilitators, we were able to deepen our understanding of the sacrament. We felt ourselves become a visible sign of the love of Jesus and God for others, by being signs of union, promotion of fidelity, and fertility. It has made us realise that in order to live our matrimony every day, we had to get involved at the family, parish, diocesan, and social levels so that others would discover God's love and kindness through our love. By living these human and Christian values, we are convinced that with time our life as a couple has become more and more stable and lasting. Couples who decide to commit themselves to each other in marriage inherit the mission of being witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ for humankind.

– Paul and Julie

+ François Thibodeau

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

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