

THE Husband HANDBOOK

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Liguori

Imprimi Potest:
Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province
The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri
To order, call 800-325-9521 or visit www.liguori.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rabior, William E.
The husband handbook / William E. Rabior and
David Wachowiak.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-7648-1745-8
1. Husbands—Religious life. 2. Marriage—Religious
aspects—Christianity. I. Wachowiak, David. II. Title.
BV4528.3.R33 2008
248.8'425—dc22

2008020205

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Printed in the United States of America
19 18 17 16 15 6 5 4 3 2

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INTRODUCTION

Every marriage—yours, ours, everyone’s—is a work in progress. Each partner in any marriage could legitimately say to the other, “Please be patient with me, God isn’t finished with me yet. And I’m not finished with me either.”

Every marriage is evolving and in an unfinished state. We who are married know that our marriage could always be something more than it already is—a little better, a little richer, a little more fulfilling. Most of us who are married want it to be more, not less. And the truth is a marriage can go from bad to good, good to great, great to even greater, if we only commit ourselves to doing the kind of marital work that will propel it forward.

And that is why we wrote this handbook.

We wrote it not because we are perfect husbands in perfect marriages or because we want the husbands who read it to be perfect. We just wanted to share with other husbands (and wives) the fruits of our marital successes and failures, our insights, the outcomes from our trials and triumphs, with the hope that in some ways they might all be of some help to the reader.

We believe that the role of husband is a special one in marriage. He is called on to be leader, protector, nurturer, guide, and much more—not in competition with his wife, but in collaboration with her. If husbands become stronger, marriages will become stronger and so will families, and that is something we all want.

We are each very proud to be a husband. It was a role we deliberately chose years ago, and one that has been a source of almost indescribable blessings for us.

This book proved to be both a window and a mirror on our own marriages. It caused us to look carefully and closely at our marriages and to see what was reflected as we wrote. It has been an important learning experience for each of us. We both feel that we are better husbands for having written this handbook, and we hope you will be, too, for having read it.

If what we wrote can help heal a hurt in your marriage, replace a barrier with a bridge, pump in some fresh air, and draw you closer to each other, then we will be enormously pleased, and this book will have been a success and well worth all the effort it took to write it. May you and your wife become all that you can be, individually and together.

We wish you the best of blessings.

William E. Rabior
David Wachowiak

CHAPTER ONE

MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE YOUR HOBBY

“Gosh darn it! When are you going to love me as much as you love the Yankees?” (Wife to husband, overheard on a New York subway)

One day Todd decided to take up golf. He is a true perfectionist who puts everything he has into whatever task he strives to master. Unfortunately, no one ever told Todd that even the very best professional golfers have bad days on the golf course and experience many frustrating rounds. He has found out that golf is an easy game to play, but a hard game to play well.

Nonetheless, Todd gives golf his all. He buys books, videos, subscribes to golfing magazines, and has purchased clubs that cost nearly the same amount as a hefty down payment on a new car.

Going to the links to play and the driving range to practice are now virtually everyday occurrences for Todd. He has been transformed into a true fanatic about his new hobby of golf. To those who are willing to listen he talks about every aspect of golf, from the best places to play to the wide variety of golf paraphernalia available (for those who have everything, there are always ball warmers).

Todd is totally committed to the sport, but he has always

remained a responsible golfer. His equipment purchases and golfing excursions are carefully budgeted and have not become a burden on his family. He would never miss an important family event because of the game. He has kept his golfing hobby in perspective and his priorities straight. His marriage and family come first, and his wife knows that, but nevertheless the hobby has energized him and brought excitement to his life. “I love the game,” he says, almost gleefully. “I’ve had lots of hobbies throughout my life, but nothing that has brought me as much pleasure as golf—even if I never get a hole in one or turn pro.”

Albert has experienced the same kind of exuberance. After he retired, he joined a local archaeology club. Under the direction of a trained archaeologist, he joins six other retirees twice a week to take part in a dig where ancient artifacts are found. What does he say about his new hobby? “It makes history come alive, and me, too.” He adds with a broad smile, “When I’m at the site of the dig, shoveling dirt, and finding arrowheads, I feel like I’m a kid again, although my aching back later reminds me otherwise. But for me, this is a hobby made in heaven. I love doing it.”

A husband with a hobby he genuinely loves gives his time, money, energy, and interest to it. He is fully committed to it, and it shows. His heart is in his hobby. If you are a husband who relates to this kind of hobby talk, we would simply ask: Doesn’t your marriage deserve equal time? Can you make your marriage your hobby? Make your marriage every bit the priority that your favorite hobby or pastime has in your life, and then extend yourself and go for even more.

What does making our marriage our hobby mean? It means that we give as much of ourselves to our relationship with our wife as we do to the favorite hobby to which we are drawn. Here are a few suggestions to better clarify this notion.

1. There's hobby language and marriage language. Both have a purpose, and both need to be learned. When Todd took up golfing, he had to learn words such as birdie, eagle, mul-ligan, and links. Each hobby has its own special and unique language. Marriage does, too. The language of marriage, which is fundamentally the language of love, can be as simple or complex as you are. Creativity is important here and can greatly enrich a marital relationship. For example, why limit yourself to pet names such as "Honey" or "Sweetheart?" How about trying a Romance language like French or Spanish: "Je t'adore" ("I adore you"), Je t'aime, ma cherie ("I love you, my darling"), or "Te amo" ("I love you")?

And what about the message given by body language? In marriage—like every other area of life—how you present yourself matters. Walking around the house in various stages of dress with stubble on your face may seem manly, but for most wives it's a turn-off, even though young Hollywood leading men seem to always have a five o'clock shadow.

If you really want to touch your wife's heart, try using song language or the language of poetry. Have you ever sung to your wife? Try it sometime and see what happens. And what about poetry? A husband and wife were celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary with a special dinner. He made a toast to her in which he said among other things that the light dimmed when she wasn't with him. She melted.

2. Make a commitment of time to your marriage. Husbands with a hobby they really like will give it unlimited time. A marriage relationship deserves the same. Nurturing and cultivating a deep relationship with your wife are byproducts of spending quality time with her. Ted had the right idea. "My hobby is fishing. If I am going on a fishing trip with my buddies, I tell my wife she is entitled to equal time. I let her choose a spot

where we can have a long weekend together, and we make it happen. It's only fair." Regular time spent with your wife provides a setting where your marriage is strengthened. You can learn to talk to each other about the little, everyday things that go with married life, in addition to the big, important, life-changing things when they arise. You can talk about anything and everything, because spending time together has made you friends, not strangers.

3. Put zeal and zest into your marriage, like you would with your favorite hobby. Gary is a huge fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and he doesn't hesitate to let the whole world know it. He not only watches his team play on television and at stadiums all over the country, he wears their logo on a variety of clothing. He practically gets lost in his hobby.

You don't have to follow the Steelers like Gary does, but how about becoming your wife's biggest fan and showing that by what you say and do? Do you have a picture of her in your wallet? At your workplace or desk? Do you remember your wedding anniversary and other important dates like her birthday without being reminded? How many years have you been married? (That one you should know instantaneously.) Do you listen as she talks about her hopes and wishes, so that you know what is important to her? Finding things that you like in common and can do together are important aspects of a marriage relationship. Suggesting that the two of you go see that "chick flick" she's talked about for days or letting her pick out the next movie rental and watching it without grumbling can become sensitive and much-appreciated gifts for her. Investing the same kind of energy in your marriage that you do with your favorite hobby can re-energize, re-invigorate, and renew your marriage. Give it a try.