

Surround Yourself With Support

by Dennis & Alynn Battaglia and Fr. Rich O'Brien
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When we were asked to write an article on "surrounding ourselves with community support," I (Alynn) thought "Why us? We just moved from California and haven't had time to surround ourselves with a community of support. We are still reminiscing about the great community we left."

Now that we are without the support we once had, we have elevated the value of a support community. We see also that we cannot walk in and have instant community. It takes time and building of friendships. Each friendship is like a gift from God. There's a mutual transmitting of love and caring and common struggles. Bonds are formed that will never slip away no matter how far or how long we spend away from them.

I know that I must get beyond my reminiscing and hear the call that God has given us. "Surround yourselves with support." It is our responsibility to call together a circle and to begin to strengthen some bonds between us.

OTHER FAMILIES

In his book *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Pope John Paul II has a great vision of true community.

"Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus within the ecclesial community-the great family made up of Christian families there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and the goal of all pastoral care."

This is what community life could mean, one family helping the other in mutual love and support. I know it takes a lot of the fear away when I think about what we are called to by our vocation of marriage. This is especially true for us. With six children, we are not as accepted even among our Catholic brothers and sisters. There was a time when we received a lot of invitations that read "Adults Only". It was usually other large families that encouraged us and gave us strength to go on.

When I remember this, I realize that we were all called to support and love one another as community and this is what made it all work and make sense. When we don't have the strength to go on, there would be a couple who would be there for us and we in turn will be there for them. I know this community is possible where we live, and it's something we all should strive for. Otherwise, the journey can be too long and too lonely.

TURN TO GOD

When I (Dennis) first thought about surrounding our relationship with support, I immediately thought of external people, places and things. This awareness has caused some examination of our values and attitudes about support. I think first of all, the greatest support for us is God. He is the center of our marriage. We need to acknowledge this daily and recognize the many ways that God makes His presence known to us. We also had to look at what kind of support we were for each other: Daily dialogue, couple prayer, the atmosphere of trust, love making, and family built around our couple relationship. We are responsible for the quality of our relationship. We also need external support. Our primary external support for our marriage should come from our parish, although we need support for our dialogue and sacramental lifestyle in the form our sharing group (Circles, Cores, etc.). We cannot expect to build parallel communities exclusively of Marriage Encounter couples and be successful over the long run. We have the gifts and skills to build small faith communities in our parishes.

TALK TO FRIENDS

I (Fr. Rich) need friends who will love me, listen to me and laugh and cry with me as we share the Dream and the price of making it a reality. What is the definition of a friend? "One who asks how you feel, and then waits to hear the answer." We all need ongoing relationships where we have the freedom to speak our minds and also are challenged and supported.

We each deserve a group of crazy, loving people who are willing to share their journey with us. They are people who want to come to know more clearly, more completely what was said at this or that point on the Weekend. Not just there, but how this or that concept is influencing our lives right now. Friends are people who do this.

You are my friends when you love and allow yourselves to be loved in this very beautiful way of living and sharing in a community. I love you and need to you to help me to become what the Lord wants of me.

We all deserve that. So...JUST DO IT!