

ay, a marriage is a lifetime

lp build solid foundation

he classes did help them
eir relationship better.
is think," Tami said.
the classes would be
> couples who didn't
as well as they did.

ere questions about
rgive your spouse if he
n extra-marital affair,"
he said. It's good
to get these issues
discussed before marriage,
Jeff said.

"The priest
pulled things out
of us that we
wouldn't have
normally dis-
cussed," he said.
Religious lead-
ers from Omaha
and Lincoln who
direct pre-marital
counseling ses-
sions stressed their
importance in es-
tablishing a solid
marriage.

Michael Chaffee of Holy
An Church in Lincoln
during sessions used the
"ch" series of tests to de-
termine strengths and
growth areas. The program
started two years ago be-
cause of the high number
of marital breakups. The
program has a great suc-
cess rate with a 90 percent
success rate, he said. "They
develop a relationship with
the clergyman so that he
can help him now instead
of a divorce lawyer three
years later."

A computer scored tests
like "Who will take the
role in the family?" "How
do you spend leisure time?"
"How do you feel comfortable
being with another?"

he said some of the
tensions may seem a little
hard.

the gamut where
feel comfortable talk-
ing," he said. Tensions
a couple establishes a
relationship, he said. "I
ask questions out to see
what's going on," he said.
"It's like a referee shirt
and blow by you could
use this together."

some of the conflicts
on the inventory test
couples. It raised issues
not raised before.

ences differ from test-
ing focusing on the indi-

Pastor Bill Yeager of the
Westminster Presbyterian Church in
Lincoln said his conferences weren't
as much information-based as they
were focused on how people are in
touch with their own ego needs.

Yeager said God must be a part of
the marriage. To help couples realize
the importance of God in their
marriage, Yeager said he reads pas-
sages from the Bible and discusses
what role God will play in the mar-
riage.

Yeager, who presides over 35-40
weddings a year, said in marriage
people need to feel love and affirma-
tion, and they can do this by under-
standing themselves.

"You have to ask, 'Can I make this
individual feel love and can I express
love?'" he said. "What every couple
wants is intimacy, more than phys-
ical intimacy."

Yeager said couples must be will-
ing to give 100 percent to their re-
lationships because too many men
and women make marriage out to be a
"working arrangement."

"You must be able to say, 'I am
more whole and complete as a per-
son because I am committed to this
person,'" Yeager said. Commitment
to faithfulness, fidelity and trust must
be discussed, he said.

"You chose this person 'til death
do us part," he said, "not let's try it
and see if it works." Yeager said no
number of tests and conferences
could guarantee how a marriage
would turn out.

"Nobody's perfect and you can't
expect perfection," he said.

Yeager said he received a positive
response from the couples he coun-
seled.

"It triggers a lot
of conversation," he said. "I sprinkle
it with personal relations. I don't
spend a lot of time on the financial
or physical side, or how to deal with
in-laws. I focus on how I know me
and my own individual needs."

Yeager said counseling helped
couples open up to each other to dis-
cuss their needs, strengths and weak-
nesses. "If you're not willing to be-
come vulnerable in love, you have
no reasons of getting married," he
said.

Although vulnerability in love is
important, communication is also a
vital tool.

Father Paul Witt of St. Mary's
Catholic Church in Lincoln said he

uses the "Foccus" test to open up dis-
cussion.

"Sometimes, they're a little sur-
prised," he said. "If a question shows
'disagree' it shows they're not com-
municating."

Witt said although he was there
to lead the discussion, he made sure
the couple talked to each other.

"I make sure they are looking at
each other," he said.

Rabbi Paul Drazen of
Omaha said his confer-
ences were also geared to
work on communication skills

"I get them started talking about
ground rules and fighting," he said.
"You have to have a peaceable dis-
agreement."

Drazen said he didn't have to
marry every couple he counseled.

"Nobody has a gun to my head
saying 'Sign this certificate,'" he
said.

Drazen said he and the couples
discussed needs and feelings and the
place of religion in life.

"People should have a common
religion and a common commit-
ment," he said. "It's important to
grow as families grow."

Drazen only performs marriages
between members of the Jewish
faith. He said if one member wishes
to convert, he or she should convert
for conversion's sake, not for the
marriage.

"The fiancée
can influence their
desire to convert,
though," he said.
Judaism is the
only modern reli-
gion that requires
conversion of
both parties be-
fore marriage.

For most
people, religions,
interdenominational or "interfaith"
marriages are not an obstacle.

Although the Keller's marriage
was a mixture of Catholic and
Lutheran faiths, they said religion
wasn't a problem for them.

Aside from a section on the test
about interfaith marriages concern-
ing children, the priest never found
it to be a big issue, Tami said.

During the wedding ceremony,
Tami said her priest made the mix-
ture of religions go smoothly.

"A lot of my friends were
Lutheran," Tami said. "Everybody
thought he was great. He made ev-
erybody feel completely comfort-
able."

Looking back after the wedding,
Tami said she was happy with the
ceremony.

"A lot of people said it was the
best Catholic wedding they had ever
been to," she said.

The Rev. Alex Wacker of St.
Andrews Lutheran Church in Lin-
coln said a good percentage of
today's marriages involved interde-
nominational couples.

"If you have a strong Lutheran
marrying a devout Catholic girl, you
could have some problems," he said.
"It really depends on who is more ac-
tive."

Wacker said in cases like Tami
and Jeff's where one is more active
in religion than the other, the prob-
lem wasn't as significant.

"It depends on the individual and
families and how they've been
raised," he said.

Jeff and Tami said they were still
uncertain of whether or not to send
their children to a Catholic church.
Jeff said he may convert, but he had
no immediate plans.

But the newlyweds were sure
about one thing. After all the discus-
sion about relationships, religion and
children, the Kellers said they were
ready for anything their
marriage may
bring.



Amy Schmidt/DN