



One of God's
signature
masterpieces
known as

family (specifically cousins) had everything to do with bringing Rommel and Janice Declines of Good Shepherd Parish in Elk Grove together more than 21 years ago. And family still has everything to do with strengthening their bond of love, day in and day out.

"I was a freshman studying sociology at UC Irvine," Rommel recalls, smiling widely as he recounts the story. "My cousins were DJs in the L.A. area and they were good friends with Janice. They arranged a blind date for us."

Janice continues without missing a beat. "Yes, they set us up for a dance. His cousin is my age." While Janice was from the Long Beach area, Rommel was from San Ramon in Northern California. "We like to think that they knew we would be a really good match," she adds, laughing.

And they were. In 1994, Rommel and Janice married at St. Raymond Church in Dublin and today they revel in the joys derived from their family of six children.

They concede it has not always been easy. As their young family was getting started they chose to move to Northern California, where Rommel would continue his education at University of San Francisco, and accept the love and support of family.

Janice says marriage and parenting take a lot of work and must be taken seriously. "It's not always comfortable, but love is a choice and our vows are sacred."

When they decided to commit to each other in marriage, the Catholic faith was central to their commitment. Janice acknowledges, however, that while Rommel's faith life was rooted in active parish participation, hers was not. "I was a cradle Catholic and received all my sacraments, but it was different to meet this person who exuded his faith – everything about him was about his faith. One of our dates was a Marian conference in Irvine!"

Four years into their marriage everything changed when they attended a Cursillo weekend. Their faith became center stage more than ever before. They learned new things about themselves. Rommel recognized that the "door was open" and he welcomed all that God may ask of him. Janice saw that her spirituality was "different" from Rommel's. She found herself saying "yes" to what God had in store for their growing family.

They worked at family life and concentrated on the decisions



Rommel and Janice Declines and their children, left to right: Teresa, Grace, Ryanna, Jeremy, Darien and Rommel Jr.



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that influenced their family. Humming a few measures, Rommel refers to the popular hymn "Loving and Forgiving," citing the words in the refrain: "Slow to anger, rich in kindness, loving and forgiving are you."

Together, they rattle off a list of treasured reminders or mantras, alternating as they share:

"Keep your heart open."

"Try not to give up."

"Covenant-bond."

Even on a more hands-on level, they commit to doing certain things together to savor time and invest in their relationship.

"Pray together."

"Attend Mass together."

"Talk."

"Run errands together."

"Text."

"Check in."

"Sync calendars."

Beyond raising their six children and serving their parish community in a range of ministries, Rommel and Janice made a commitment to the permanent diaconate. When Rommel reflects on the formation of his spirituality throughout his life, he always recognized a deep desire to serve the Lord. And because of the astute observation and open sharing of his pastor, Father Leon Juchniewicz, he discerned the calling to serve as a deacon. Accepted to the diocese's formation program in 2014, he and Janice have begun the four-year journey of instruction and study leading to his ordination.

Humblly and prayerfully, Rommel and Janice, barely in their 40s, exemplify the special wisdom, gifted from God, which guides them in their marriage. God is at the center of their relationship and they know that "not everything has to be planned," Janice says. "We just let God."