

## **Helping Single Catholic Girls Survive and Thrive**

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Review of: “The Catholic Girl’s Survival Guide for the Single Years,” by Emily Stimpson (Emmaus Road, 2012, 142 pp)

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One of the growing pastoral concerns for the Church in the United States is the number of young Catholic women who believe that God has given them the vocation to marriage but who are unable to find decent husbands.

We’re not talking about the caricatured homely girls with no personalities praying for miraculous knights to swoop in to take them to far away imaginary kingdoms.

We’re talking about objectively attractive women of vivacious character who are not looking for Mr. Perfect but just for Mr. Good. They go on dates. They humbly allow friends and family members to set them up. They sign up for Catholic on-line dating services. And the vast majority of them just get older by the year, with no marriage prospects in sight.

The situation weighs not just on the women, but on their parents, siblings, and friends. It also weighs on the Church, including pastors who as spiritual fathers want not only to encourage but facilitate their vocation. In many cases, however, good unmarried men are hard to find. And the women — and all those who care about them — suffer.

For all those women in this situation of longing, there’s a great new book by Emily Stimpson, “The Catholic Girl’s Survival Guide for the Single Years” (Emmaus Road, 142 pages). Stimpson writes not only out of her years of experience as a journalist surveying the larger issues of dating, marriage, and Church moral teachings, but out of her personal experience still being single in her mid-thirties yearning with ever greater urgency marriage and a family.

She wrote this work to give hope and help to other single Catholic women who believe they have the vocation to marriage but who have no present prospects. Although she explicitly said that it wasn’t intended for other audiences — especially men, whom she predicted would be “horribly disappointed and bored” — it is a tremendous resource for all those parents, pastors and friends who want to understand in greater depth the pain and practical issues of women in this emotional and spiritual desert, so that they may know better how to encourage them and to avoid hurting them by well-intentioned but incisive daggers.

Stimpson begins with a discussion of whether the unconsecrated single life can be considered a vocation. After clearly and concisely summarizing the Church’s theology on the distinction between our universal calling to be saints, primary vocation to a particular state in life and secondary vocation to a specific type of service, she noted that every secondary vocation is meant to be an exclusive and enduring gift of oneself to God and others. For that reason, she concludes, “it’s hard to see how the answer” to the question of whether the unconsecrated single life is an authentic vocation “can be anything other than no.”

That brings her to tackle head-on the difficult question of whether those women who have not married, but who do not feel called to be chaste religious, consecrated virgins or lay celibates have missed their vocation. She shows how some people — often for reasons outside of their control — do not enter into the vocation to which God has seemed to have called them. She cited the generation of European soldiers slain in World War I, and

the corresponding generation of women unable to find husbands, as an example. Many faithfully Catholic young women today may have been left tragically in a similar situation, she suggests, by the “sexual revolution, the breakdown of marriage, abortion, contraception, pornography, cohabitation and even serial dating,” which she says have “spiritually wounded men and women in our world as seriously as mustard gas physically wounded England’s soldiers in 1917.”

In a beautiful chapter on who woman is and is called to be, she discusses what John Paul II called the “feminine genius” — to receive, nourish and nurture life — and suggested ten practical ways for women to learn how to cultivate that authentically feminine expertise: by receiving others and their help, love, knowledge, advice, compliments; by listening to God and others; by looking to those in need and serving them; by submitting to God, the truth and what is right and good; by enduring difficulties patiently and tenaciously; by becoming gentle; by dressing and acting modestly; by appreciating and cultivating beauty, discovering what real beauty is and intentionally trying to look lovely.

Stimpson also tackles the dos and don’ts of dating, sex, chastity and the biological clock, how to choose marriage friendly yet rewarding careers, to relate to married couples and their children, and to respond to the suffering of being without a husband and children.

Throughout it all, she acknowledges the struggles but refuses to wallow — or allow other single women to wallow — in self-pity. She gives practical advice about how not only to cope or “survive,” but to make the most of the positives of their condition, while approaching the future with hope.

The book’s subtitle is “The nuts and bolts of staying sane and happy while waiting for Mr. Right.” Stimpson’s sanity and happiness radiate throughout the work, while she admits and courageously confronts her unfulfilled longings. While this book cannot substitute for a good Catholic husband and family in the short term, it is a great means in the interim to help single Catholic girls survive and thrive with mind and heart intact.