



NATE AND VANESSA 'LEAVE IT IN THE HANDS OF THE LORD'

From the front lines to the front of the altar

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHEL SIMA

KNOWING HOW EASY IT CAN BE FOR WEDDINGS TO CAUSE WORRY AND ANXIETY, Nate and Vanessa Lozano intended to avoid any hint of undue stress. After their July 2019 engagement, they made most of their plans by December for their Nov. 14, 2020 wedding date.

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“We wanted to stay away from stress,” explains Nate, clearly sensitized to its ill effects. As nurses, both Nate and Vanessa see a fair amount in their work at Sutter Sacramento’s cardiovascular surgery ICU and UC Davis’ emergency department, respectively.

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Members of Good Shepherd Parish in Elk Grove, the couple reached out early to ensure they coordinated all the necessary marriage preparation requirements. Growing up in the church, there was





nothing more important to them than a sacramental wedding.

"I have a big family and Vanessa has a lot of relatives and we wanted to have a big party, too," Nate, 30, recounts of their original reception plans at a beautiful Delta venue for 250 guests.

When news of the coronavirus started to intensify by March 2020, the couple realized the most well-laid plans could not have anticipated the hold the pandemic would have on every facet of life, including their wedding arrangements.

"It was up and down," Vanessa, 29, interjects with hindsight of a string of months and a perpetual state of unknowing. "A weird, very tumultuous year," she says, referring not only to the "wait and see" stance they adopted regarding their wedding details, but also in terms of health and safety.

Vanessa contracted COVID-19 by June through exposure in her front-line emergency room role. "I actually had mild symptoms," she explains, recalling her quarantine at her mother's home, distanced from her mom and her fiancé.

"Our attention shifted away from our wedding to just making sure everyone was safe," Nate shares of the surreal time gripping the world. "Especially since we were seeing it firsthand in the hospitals," Vanessa adds, completing Nate's thought. She distinguishes the dire seriousness in her emergency room workplace. "It was evident it was going to last the whole year," she says.

By July and August, Nate and Vanessa decided to forego a big wedding as California counties moved between red and purple tiers, and varying closure mandates associated with the county's positivity rate. They knew even if they proceeded to make new plans, the very next week, restrictions might be different changing everything again. They considered rescheduling but held fast to their original date with hope. As it drew closer, they would determine what that meant for their ceremony.

PRESERVING THE SANCTITY OF THE SACRAMENT, OF LIFE

"Let's focus on the church and liturgy," Nate remembers as their abiding priority mindset in the blur of melding months. Regardless of the color of the tier, Nate and Vanessa wanted to be married inside the church. An intimate, backyard gathering "like fellowship after church" would follow.

Nate confesses initial challenges for him to trim the guest list and forfeit party plans but the couple agreed the ceremony and church comforted them as a steadfast constant, "a blessing in itself."

"Seeing the worst of the worst," Vanessa says of COVID-19 and its scourge, "we loved how we could still protect and observe the sanctity of the sacrament we were about to receive and do it in a way that was safe."

"My dad always says 'leave it in the hands of the Lord,'"

Nate reflects, his voice tinged with emotion "and he was praying for us every day."

"As nurses, we knew the right thing to do," Vanessa offers with eyes of acute understanding. "One person infected with COVID could change the entire landscape of someone's life," she cautions, stirring visuals of intubated patients, on oxygen, on high-flow. "It showed me a reality that I would not want for my family and friends," she concedes, confident their decisions revered the holiness of matrimony and the lives of those around them.

IN GOOD TIMES AND IN BAD, IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

As Nov. 14 approached, expecting 100 guests in the church, the tiers took a turn just the Tuesday before. They received news that only a handful of family, friends and attendants would be able to attend in person. Others would need to connect online via Zoom to watch the nuptials.

Nate and Vanessa "took a day" to recollect and process before getting to the task of notifying everyone.

"I mean you don't have to be present to be felt," Nate poses with a newfound outlook hardly entertained just months before. They draw a parallel to COVID patients alone without visitors.

"It made me feel so happy that we were able to celebrate with our closest friends and family and to see their faces," Vanessa expresses, further conveying how it "made me feel so much more blessed that there were all the others on Zoom with us."

"That's something that always will resonate with us about our marriage," Nate intimates and continues "we're able to connect in other ways...check in with family and let them know we're thinking of them, praying for them."

The November weather had been warm but changed quickly. Daylight savings time ended, prompting some additional quick thinking for the post-ceremony gathering in the backyard. A few heaters and some stringed lights offered the fix. Everything was as God meant it to be. Nate and Vanessa were married.

Light beamed through the windows of Good Shepherd Church, and light shined in Nate and Vanessa's hearts. With all that had happened during the past eight months – the ups and downs, the good, the bad, the sickness and renewed health – Nate and Vanessa's love conquered COVID and they are ready for the rest of their journey, leaving it in the hands of the Lord. †

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