

February

Proposed Theme: All Married Couples

The Joy of Love (Pope Francis):

As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable, or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. (No. 35)

The safeguarding of the Lord's gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community. (No.87)

Some Thoughts:

- Christian tradition sees marriage as a life-long commitment between a man and a woman. This comes from the Scriptures of both Testaments and is based on the complementarity of the sexes as created by God in God's own image. This of course is challenged today by the call for same sex marriage. We have to find our way around this complex question without compromising our beliefs.
- Our Catholic tradition acknowledges marriage within the community of the Church as one of the seven Sacraments. This is a huge act of faith in the importance of this love relationship. We recognise this relationship as different from all other relationships and that it is vital for the health and wellbeing of both Church and society. This is challenged by the phenomenon of so many couples living together without marriage. We have to find our way around this equally

complex question without letting our vision for Church and society become diminished.

- We proclaim marriage as a permanent commitment – **‘all the days of my life’; ‘until death do us part’**. Divorce is a very real part of our world. Many marriages break up for all kinds of reasons. How do we hold our belief in the permanence of marriage while being compassionate towards those marriages that don’t work out?
- We hold that marriage is also an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. Many societies allow for polygamy where there can be multiple marriage partners. There is no doubt that our world could easily go in this direction too. How can we hold up our vision of a permanent, exclusive marriage relationship of a woman and man that becomes a Sacrament within the context of the Church without ignoring the realities of the world we live in and without alienating others? It is indeed a very difficult challenge today.

The one thing we can and need to do today as a parish community is to honour and support all those couples who are married among us. As part of their commitment to one another we, as a community, have committed ourselves to them to recognise their special grace for the Church and for the world.

Questions:

1. **Marriage is a journey, not a destination.** During the next year, how can the parish community help to create supports for married couples as they travel their journey together? Look at what is available for couples like Marriage Encounter, Love is for Life, etc. and see how you could encourage couples to take

part in what is available and make it somehow a parish initiative, **for example by having an annual day for Marriage renewal in the parish.**

2. **A successful marriage is one in which a couple enters into between fifteen and twenty different marriages with one another in the course of a lifetime.** Can you see the wisdom and the beauty of this statement? How could you as a parish help to bring this to the attention of married couples to help them to realise that the marriage they are in at present needs to be worked at to make it the best possible marriage for each other.
3. **Marriage is a three-partner relationship that does not work well with only two.** How could you as a parish help to encourage married couples to pray together regularly for the sake of their marriage? Research shows that couples who pray together are in far less danger of breaking up than those who don't. And this makes sense!! Or does it?

Consider the following: The current divorce rate in the U.S. is 50% of all marriages, or one divorce out of every two marriages.

However, notice the difference in the following statistics.

Of those couples **who worship together each Sunday**, the divorce rate is 3.3%, or one divorce in every 30 couples.

Of those couples **who pray together in their homes** on a regular basis, the divorce rate is 0.3%, or one divorce out of every 300 couples.

This is taken from **For Better and Forever** P. 130 by Fr. Rob Ruhnke, C.Ss.R.

One way for couples to pray together regularly can be found in the website: www.countinuousprayer.net/coupleprayer Please let your couples know about this or invite them to contact myself at dohertyjohnny@gmail.com to receive a weekly email of Couple Prayer.

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- St. Valentine's Day is on Friday 14th of February. How could you use this occasion to highlight married couples in your parish? Possible examples: Invite all the couples who were married in the parish last year to celebrate at one of the Sunday Masses
- Celebrate significant wedding anniversaries at one of the Masses
- Invite all married couples present to renew their marriage vows on this day

Points for the organising group to keep in mind

- A full day of Prayer for Marriage & Family Life every month is a very significant event in a parish.
- Because it is a quiet event it could easily go unnoticed. That is why preparing for it each month is so important.
- A notice should be put into the Parish Newsletter on the weekend before the date for your parish.
- This notice should be an appreciation of the generosity of those who have taken on an hour of prayer for that day. It should also be an invitation to others to sign up for an hour, with clear instructions on how to do so.
- This notice should also be a call to focus all the prayer of the parish on Marriage & Family Life for that day.
- Each month you receive a document with a particular focus for the month. This is meant to open us up to developments in parish support for various aspects of Marriage & Family Life.
- These developments need planning; they need people who will lead them; they need resources to support them. But they are coming from, and are grounded in, the on-going monthly day of prayer. The Organising Group has a special place in initiating these developments and in getting other people to help to implement them.
- One or two initiatives each year, even small ones, will eventually make a real difference to our homes and to the whole parish.

Parish Prayer Day for Marriage and Family Life

On the of each month, our parish of prays for the 24 hours for Marriage & Family Life. This is part of a Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage & Family Life as other parishes and groups take on the prayer for the other days of the month.

To make this prayer continuous, many people in our parish have committed themselves to a specific hour of prayer on in such a way that the whole day and night are covered.

Everyone is invited to join in this prayer, either by taking on an hour, or by including this intention in your own prayer during that day; by including it in the prayers of the Masses celebrated on that day; by inviting the schools of the parish to involve the children and young people in praying for it; by asking any prayer groups that are meeting on that day to also include a prayer for it.