

February 2018

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.